

Hall of Fame: Bobbie J. Vermillion

In 1992, our chapter created the Central Oklahoma Chapter Hall of Fame. The original inductee was William J. "Bill" Collins, Jr., followed by Louis C. Nettleship the next year, then Bobbie Vermillion, Dr. Faye McQuiston, and Harry Rountree, all inducted in 1994. On our chapter website's History page (ashraecok.org/History), we have biographies on Bill Collins and Louis Nettleship. Last year, in the February and March, 2024 chapter newsletters, I wrote about Harry Rountree and Dr. McQuiston. This month I'd like to highlight Bobbie Vermillion.

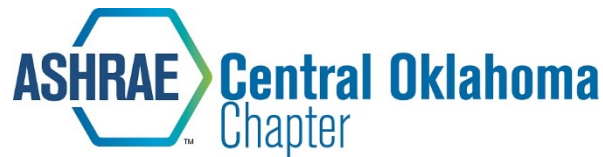
Bobbie Joe Vermillion was a man who lived life with passion, humor, and dedication. Born in 1930 in Clinton, OK, and raised in Chickasha, Bobbie's larger-than-life personality was evident from an early age. He attended the Missouri Military Academy (MMA) in Mexico, Missouri, where he developed the discipline that would guide him throughout his career. A gifted athlete, Bobbie went on to play football at both the University of Louisville and the University of Florida, where his love for sports flourished. After returning to Chickasha, he married the love of his life, Bonnie Jo Peacock, "Babe," in 1952, and together they built a life filled with love and adventure.

The couple made their home in Chickasha, where Bobbie worked for about eight years alongside his father in the family's plumbing and heating contracting business. In 1960, Bobbie left the family business to become a sales rep for the Don R. Groth Sales company. In 1968, Bobbie and Bonnie moved to Edmond where they would live for the rest of their lives. Bobbie was the owner of AME, Inc., a manufacturer's representative company specializing in air distribution and exhaust products. His brother, Rick Vermillion, joined him in 1971 and continued to lead AME after Bobbie's passing in 2010. Bobbie had previously partnered with Bob Estep at the Robert E. Estep Company in 1965. Bobbie formed AME, Inc. in 1970 and Bob Estep renamed his company, Oklahoma Air Filter, in 1972.

A larger-than-life personality, Bobbie was a towering man with a great sense of humor and an unwavering love for sports, particularly college football. His warmth and humor drew people in, and his dedication to his profession and community was unmatched. Bobbie was deeply committed to ASHRAE where he held numerous positions at the chapter, regional, and society levels. He is most remembered for his roles as Membership Chairman, Research Promotion (RP) Chairman, and Chapter Historian. Bobbie served as Chapter President in 1977-78, and earned the prestigious Golden Gavel. Even in his final year (2010), at the age of 79, Bobbie was still serving as RP Chairman.

Bill Collins, who shared an office building with Bobbie on Classen Blvd. back when Bobbie was working with Bob Estep, was instrumental in introducing him to ASHRAE and sparking his passion for the society. Bobbie's dedication to ASHRAE was unparalleled, just like Bill. He was a tireless fundraiser, raising over \$175,000 for Research Promotion in the three years leading up to his passing. His persistence inspired local manufacturers, including securing CES Group's membership in the "Golden Circle," committing \$10,000 annually. Bobbie's impact was so profound that at the 2010 ASHRAE Society Winter Conference in Orlando, Florida, three honors were announced in his name:

1. The Pinnacle Award was renamed the Bobbie Vermillion Pinnacle Award to recognize the chapter raising the most money each year.
2. Bobbie was awarded the Bill Collins Research Promotion Award posthumously, recognizing his outstanding dedication and success in promoting research.
3. An Endowment Fund was established in Bobbie's name by the Central Oklahoma Chapter, with the earnings supporting ASHRAE research.



Bobbie approached everything with enthusiasm and humor. One of his most memorable campaigns was during his time as Membership Chairman in 1972, when he promised to lose one pound for every new member applicant—a challenge that resulted in him losing 50 pounds by January! But his most creative strategy involved a live duck. To encourage new memberships, Bobbie introduced the duck at a chapter meeting and declared that the duck was an honorary “member” of the Membership Promotion committee. The rule was simple: the duck could be passed to another member only if the current holder secured a new member application. Not wanting to be responsible for caring for a duck, members scrambled to each get a new member signed up. Over that year, 63 new members joined!

Bobbie’s humor extended everywhere he went. One story occurred during an ASHRAE Winter Meeting in New York City. While Bobbie and his brother Rick were walking down the street, a man crossed over and asked Bobbie for \$50. Without missing a beat, Bobbie, with his trademark wit, replied, “You get back over on the other side of the street—we’re working this side!” The man, clearly taken aback, quickly crossed back to the other side without another word, leaving Bobbie and Rick laughing at the encounter.

Another classic Bobbie story happened in Chicago during an AHR Expo in the late 1980s. Before Chinese imports flooded the U.S. market, the Japanese were known for meticulously copying American-manufactured goods. At the trade show, it was common to see Japanese visitors taking numerous photos of American products to replicate back home. One particular booth displayed a Japanese-made product with a bold sign stating, “Do not take pictures.” Bobbie, always up for a challenge, knew exactly what he wanted to do — but he didn’t have a camera. He went over to a friend at a nearby booth and asked to borrow his camera. When his friend responded that the camera had no film, Bobbie grinned and said, “I don’t need any film, just the camera!” Armed with an empty camera, Bobbie marched over to the booth and began dramatically “taking pictures” from every angle. The short Japanese exhibitors, unsure of how to react to this giant cowboy clicking away, decided it was best not to say anything, leaving Bobbie to get his point across with a mischievous smile.

When not working, Bobbie enjoyed collecting and selling art, often traveling with his wife to Santa Fe, NM, to indulge in his passion. Bobbie was a loving son, brother, and uncle, known for his patience, guidance, and unwavering support of his family. His nieces and nephews looked up to him as a steady source of love and wisdom.

In his later years, Bobbie faced mobility challenges, but John Harrod and his wife, Marsha, frequently helped Bobbie and Bonnie travel to ASHRAE functions. John witnessed firsthand how Bobbie’s passion for Research Promotion never waned, and his influence continued to inspire those around him.

In his obituary, Bonnie, honoring Bobbie’s deep love for ASHRAE, requested that in lieu of flowers, contributions be made to ASHRAE Research, c/o Central OK Chapter. Bobbie’s legacy lives on through the many lives he touched, the humor he shared, and the passion he inspired. His influence on ASHRAE and his community endures, reminding all who knew him to approach work—and life—with dedication, creativity, and a generous dose of humor.



*Bobbie J. Vermillion (right) – 1992
(receiving the ASHRAE Distinguished Service Award)*

Dusty Stoabs, PE
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