



In Remembrance of Tino Mendez

It is with great sadness that I report that Tino Mendez passed away on December 8, 2024, at the age of 83. He was born in 1941 in Trinidad, Cuba. A licensed Professional Engineer, Tino earned his engineering degree from Louisiana State University. He dedicated 43 years of his career to Benham, where he built a reputation for excellence and innovation.

Tino worked in the same department as my dad for over a decade, and my dad had many stories about him. Most of these revolved around Tino's exceptional skills as a salesman—perhaps too exceptional! My dad used to say, “Tino could sell ice to Eskimos!” Tino had a knack for persuading clients to hire Benham for highly challenging projects, often involving energy efficiency upgrades. Sometimes, after getting a project, he would return to the office, and everyone on the team would go in a frenzy to figure out how to deliver on his ambitious promises. Tino had a deep passion for projects that could save clients energy and provide a solid return on their investment.

Tino was also deeply committed to ASHRAE. He firmly believed in the value of building lasting professional connections through ASHRAE, even across the country, to benefit both you as an individual and your business. He often shared stories of how his network helped his team at Benham. For instance, while working on an out-of-state project, Tino would reach out to ASHRAE contacts in the area for insights into local equipment suppliers, contractors, inspectors, and utility companies. Getting information from someone local to the project location, that he trusted, was invaluable to him.

Tino also championed the leadership opportunities ASHRAE offered. He believed that progressing through the chairs and serving as Chapter President provided unparalleled experience in developing leadership skills—better than even expensive leadership training programs, he would say. He consistently encouraged young engineers to volunteer for chapter, regional and even Society-level positions, noting the exponential growth such roles could provide to their leadership skills.

Tino's involvement with ASHRAE spanned more than 50 years. He joined in 1972 and was honored with the Distinguished 50-Year Membership Award in 2023. Other awards he received included the coveted Golden Gavel as Chapter President in 1984, the Regional Award of Merit in 1990, recognition as an ASHRAE Fellow in 1995 for his contributions to the HVAC&R industry, and his induction into the Central Oklahoma Chapter Hall of Fame in 1996. Most recently, Tino served as the chapter's Honors and Awards Committee Chair as late as 2021.

Tino was also a gifted storyteller. One of his favorite stories was about his first trip to the United States: “For those of you who don't know, I was born in Cuba. After high school, I attended LSU in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. I graduated in 1963 with a degree in Mechanical Engineering and soon moved to Oklahoma City, where my future wife Sylvia (also Cuban) and her family had settled. Our hometown in Cuba was about 60 miles east of Havana on the north coast.

My plane was scheduled to leave shortly after 1 PM, but Hurricane Ella was churning in the Gulf of Mexico, right between Havana and New Orleans. It was a four-engine propeller plane, and we experienced a slight delay. Halfway to New Orleans, just when we were supposed to be flying above the hurricane, the plane began losing engines and altitude. It felt like forever, but we finally made it to Moisant Field in New Orleans with two functioning engines.

I had taken English courses in school and had a private tutor, so I felt reasonably confident about my ability to communicate. What no one warned me about was the southern accent! My first attempt at speaking English was with a porter at the baggage area. No matter how much I tried, we couldn't

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understand each other. Finally, he saw my LSU papers and helped me get on a bus to downtown New Orleans.

Looking utterly lost, I must have attracted the attention of an INS agent who approached me, checked my papers, and started speaking to me in Cuban Spanish. He had learned the language while serving as a U.S. Marine at the Embassy in Havana. He shared coffee with me and guided me to the right bus to Baton Rouge.

When I finally arrived, it was hours later than expected. I knocked on the door of my accommodation and heard noises inside, but no one answered. I walked around the building looking for someone, eventually finding a lighted window where a woman was getting ready for bed. Acting quickly, I knocked on the glass. Luckily, she was the housemother and had been expecting me. She acted as if everything was normal and let me in. Turns out, a sorority had borrowed our ballroom because theirs was under renovation. Those were the noises I had heard earlier. Did I mention this was my first time flying on an airplane?"

Tino's life was marked by resilience, humor, a passion for ASHRAE and solving engineering problems. He will be remembered as an inspiring professional engineer, a dedicated leader, and a beloved ASHRAE member who left a lasting impact on everyone he met. We will miss seeing Tino at chapter meetings, and we'll miss seeing Sylvia as well, who regularly attended the CRC each year with him. Sylvia passed away 10 weeks ago. They were married 61 years.



Tino Mendez (1941 – 2024)

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