



Interview with Chapter Past President Michael Halcomb

Dusty: Thank you for taking the time to answer a few questions about yourself and your year serving as ASHRAE Chapter President. First, could you tell me a little about your background — where you grew up and went to school?

Michael: I grew up in the small town of Cement, Oklahoma, and graduated from Cement High School in a class of just 16 seniors. After high school, I attended Oklahoma State University—Okmulgee, where I earned my associate’s degree in Air Conditioning & Refrigeration Technologies. Growing up in a small town instilled in me the value of teamwork, accountability, and wearing multiple hats — skills that have served me well throughout my career.

Dusty: How did you get into the HVAC industry, and specifically into the controls business?

Michael: It’s kind of a long story, but I’ll keep it short. Growing up in a house built in the 1940s without central heating or air conditioning, my dad bought a 1½-ton air conditioning unit the summer after my 7th-grade year. I was in awe of how it worked, and I immediately became fascinated with the science behind it.

My formal path into HVAC started through the technical program at OSU-Okmulgee, but I quickly realized I had a passion for systems — not just how equipment works, but how everything ties together. I began my career in Test and Balance, which I’m very thankful for because it taught me the engineering and science of complete systems. Over time, that passion carried me into commissioning and more advanced systems work.

I was drawn to controls because that’s where the real “brains” of the system live. It ties everything together — mechanical contractors, electrical contractors, architects, engineers, test and balance professionals, and commissioning teams. Building Automation is where it all comes to life. It allows us to optimize efficiency, diagnose issues, and directly impact building comfort, safe indoor environments, and energy performance.

Dusty: Can you give us a feel for what goes on at ES2 on a day-to-day basis?

Michael: ES2 is a very dynamic place. We’re not just about installing systems — we focus on engineered solutions that improve building performance across the board. On any given day, our team might be testing and balancing a large chilled-water system, programming controls for a complex hospital or laboratory environment, commissioning a new university facility, or solving an energy-efficiency challenge for a client.

What makes it exciting is that every day is different, but the common thread is teamwork and problem-solving. We take pride in all our services because each one helps clients extend the life of their equipment, reduce waste (both time and energy), and deliver safe, comfortable environments.

Dusty: What originally led you to join ASHRAE and later agree to become Chapter Secretary back in 2022?

Michael: Like a lot of people, I first joined ASHRAE for technical resources and networking. But what really kept me involved was the community — the friendships and professional relationships with people who share the same passion for our industry.

In 2022, when I was asked to step up as Chapter Secretary, I saw it as an opportunity to give back and to help strengthen the Chapter for the next generation. Saying yes was my way of paying it forward in our Oklahoma community.

Dusty: As you served two years as Secretary and then President-Elect, I'm sure you were building a plan in your mind for when you became Chapter President. Can you highlight some of that thought process?

Michael: Absolutely. From the very beginning, I wanted our Chapter to feel like a team with a clear scoreboard. Just like in Building Automation, what gets measured gets adjusted.

My thought process centered around how to empower volunteers, maintain the momentum that the previous President, Scott Sanders, had built, and ensure people were having fun while learning and growing. I also spent time thinking about succession planning, member engagement, and how to align with the Society theme, *"Empowering Our Workforce: Building a Sustainable Future."*

My goal wasn't just one good year — it was to set the Chapter up for long-term success.

Dusty: In 2024, you inherited a strong group of committee chairs, but a few key positions were vacated. How did you fill those roles and still end up with such a successful year?

Michael: That was definitely a challenge. We had to fill five roles, but the strength of our Chapter is the depth of our bench. We have a truly great community. I looked for people who were ready for more "playing time."

We tapped into younger members, leaned on past chairs for support, and kept communication clear. Everyone who stepped into a new role really excelled, and that made all the difference.

Dusty: Congratulations on winning the Golden Gavel! What does that award mean to you, and did you go into CRC in Tulsa feeling confident?

Michael: Thank you! Winning the Golden Gavel was incredibly meaningful — not just for me, but for the entire Chapter. To me, it's like winning a championship: it's not about one player, it's about the whole team coming together and executing.

Going into CRC, I honestly didn't know how it would go, but I knew our Chapter had done an excellent job overall. Scott had laid out a plan during his year that we were able to capitalize on during mine.

It takes a team — and we had the attendance, the programs, the student involvement, the RP fundraising, and the communication to back it up. Still, until you hear your Chapter's name called, you never take it for granted. That was a proud moment.

Dusty: I'm sure that during your year as Chapter President, there were things that caught you off guard or felt a little odd about how ASHRAE business is conducted. Can you recall anything that surprised you?

Michael: One thing that caught me off guard was just how many behind-the-scenes details there are to running a Chapter — from managing Society deadlines to coordinating volunteers. Thankfully, we had a great team.

Another surprise was how much flexibility is required. Things don't always go as planned, and you have to adapt on the fly. But honestly, that's part of the fun. The quirks of how ASHRAE business is done remind you that this is a volunteer-driven organization — and that's what makes it special.

Dusty: Now that you've moved through the chairs, what advice would you give to future ASHRAE Chapter leaders?

Michael: My advice would be threefold:

1. Empower your team — Don't try to do everything yourself. Give people ownership and trust them to deliver.
2. Keep the scoreboard visible — Set goals and track progress so people know how they're contributing to success.
3. Make it fun — Whether it's meetings, socials, or fundraisers, people stick around when they're learning and enjoying themselves.

At the end of the day, it's about building relationships. If you focus on people first, the awards, recognition, and success will follow.

Dusty: Michael, thank you for taking the time to do this interview and, again, congratulations on the Golden Gavel!

Dusty Stoabs, PE
ASHRAE Central Oklahoma Chapter Historian