

Interview with Chapter Past President, Mr. Scott Sanders

As has become a tradition, doing 10 in a row now, I've made it a point to interview the outgoing Chapter President at the end of the Society year. This year, I have the honor to interview Scott Sanders P.E., Associate Principal, and leader in Alvine Engineering's Oklahoma City branch office. The chapter had a phenomenal year under his leadership in 2023-24, and this interview highlights many of the reasons why.

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?

Scott: I grew up in Albuquerque, New Mexico and was always fascinated with flight, the space program, and open wheel IndyCar racing. I thought it would be really cool to fly the shuttle, or design a car that wins at Indy. I came to Oklahoma in 1987 to attend Oklahoma State University with a major in mechanical engineering with aerospace option. I finished my B.S.M.E in 1992 and the economy, especially in the aerospace sector, was down.

Dusty: How did you get into the HVAC industry and why did you join ASHRAE?

Scott: When I graduated, OSU enticed me into staying for graduate school. As a graduate student, I would get in-state tuition and a quarter time teaching assistant position. I needed to find something to focus my studies on for graduate school and the classes I enjoyed the most were vibrations and thermodynamics. I also wanted to choose a path that would be stable and not subject to the ups and downs like the aerospace sector. I felt the auto industry was more stable, and that the HVAC industry would be stable because we all need heating and cooling in our lives. I met with one of the newer professors in the MAE department, Dr. Spitler, and discussed with him the research opportunities he had available. He was wanting to build a room for studying convective heat transfer similar to research he had worked on at UIUC, but had ideas to improve it. Since Dr. Spitler was an ASHRAE member, and the OSU student branch advisor, I felt it was important to join as a student member if this was going to be my career in order to learn more about the field, and have the opportunity to network. In 1995 I finished my Master's degree, entered the workforce, and transitioned from a student member to an associate member in ASHRAE.

Dusty: What led you to serving on the chapter committees you were involved with, and ultimately what prompted you to go through the chairs?

Scott: I wanted to get involved with our Chapter and I felt that Student Activities would be a great opportunity. At the time our Chapter's approach with Student Activities was take a recent engineering graduate that wanted to be involved and put them in Student Activities. I felt that we could do better in this area, that we needed to attract students not only to ASHRAE, but to our industry. We needed to take more of a business development approach, take ASHRAE to the

students, and discuss with them how we could make their engineering studies, and life after graduation, better.

Honestly, I never thought about going through the chairs. In 2021 Joe Sanders called me one afternoon to tell me that the Chapter President-Elect was stepping down, and as such, Jon Wilmore would be moving from Secretary to President-Elect, and someone was needed to fill in as Secretary. I told Joe I would, but let me think on continuing past that point. Knowing that it would be time commitment as Chapter President, I wanted to make sure I had the backing of my employer and my wife. When I talked to Doug Alvine about it, he told me absolutely, go do it, we are behind you one hundred percent, and my wife said the same thing.

Dusty: As you went through your years as Secretary and President-Elect, I'm sure it was building in your mind as to what you wanted to focus on once you took over the reins of the chapter. Can you highlight some of those initial thoughts?

Scott: Coming out of the pandemic, we were challenged with attendance and excitement for our events. Pre-pandemic our Chapter meeting attendance was good, and we always had good turnouts for our events. We were starting to build momentum to get back to those levels, but we were struggling. We started to focus on offering more than just a PDH, and we were placing an emphasis on the social and networking aspect of our Chapter. Jon Wilmore started leading that charge his year with the Expo and the cornhole tournament, and we just needed to continue to build on that momentum.

I felt that two things were hurting our meeting attendance. The first was every meeting presentation was by a manufacture, that rarely focused on the engineering or application of the product, but more on the results or where their product was used. Also, every manufacturer that comes to town wants to meet with all the engineers at their offices. This made it difficult to attract attendees because why should they pay for lunch to hear the same presentation in their office for free?

The second thing was PDH's are so readily available on line through webinars and manufacturer's websites. We needed to offer topics that were engaging and not readily available on line.

Dusty: There have been some "firsts" over the past couple of years, such as the OKC Expo and the Cornhole Tournament as you mentioned. Can you talk about some of the "firsts" during this last year, as it seems there were a number of them?

Scott: We started with the golf tournament, and as I was looking at the different sponsorships we had, it struck me, what if we had the first President's Lunch at the golf tournament? I asked past Chapter Presidents if they would join me in donating \$100.00 each to help sponsor the lunch. This allowed those that have served as Chapter President to give back to the Chapter and allow us to recognize these individuals at the start of our year for their past service and leadership.

The next "first," was a pickleball tournament. I felt we needed another fall event and not everyone plays golf, but pickleball is popular and I felt we could attract the non-golfers to come out for an afternoon of fun. We had 37 teams sign up and had a blast!

Building on the cornhole tournament from last year, one of the firsts for this year was invite everyone to attend the events. You may not be participating, but come out, see the vendors that are set up at tables, have lunch, and socialize. We had people come out to Kickingbird just for lunch after the golf round finished up. While we had 37 teams for pickleball, we probably had over 100 people in attendance because people came out to eat, socialize, and watch the games.

While it was not seen by the Chapter membership, the other “first” was the development of a milestone chart for our Chapter operations to guide the officers and board of governors during the year. This was an easy reference for us to use during the year for operating the Chapter and hitting our deadline dates.

Dusty: Every committee was active last year, but Student Activities seemed, to me, to be especially engaged. Can you reflect on the activities and events that took place, as well as the individuals making it happen, and do you think your earlier involvement in student activities played a role in making this committee especially active this last year?

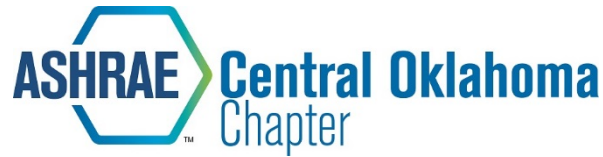
Scott: Michael Akins has done exceptional in this role as evident by his award this year in Region 8 for “Student Activity Chair on the Rise”, and he brings a fresh perspective to Student Activities. Payton Parker joining in to help Michael has brought great energy to the K-12 portion of Student Activities that has been missing for some time and honestly, we have struggled with in the past. Basically, I learned to get out of their way and allow them to plan the events, and offer encouragement or feedback when it is needed.

Our biggest event for Student Activities was when Society President Ginger Scoggins visited our Chapter. A text message the first part of February I received stated, “Do you think we can get 100 students at OSU to show up and listen to Ginger speak?” Like Ginger stated this year, “Challenge Accepted.” We started planning and coordinating her visit to OSU soon afterwards, working with the Student Branch Chapter there. We came close by having 76 students show up.

Dusty: In all the other committees, what members would you like to give a shout-out to for exceptional service?

Scott: I have to start with Research Promotion and the event planning committee. Heather Martin was awarded the Region 8 RP Chair of the year. And again, continuing from last year, we needed an event committee to be part of RP. Michele Lefebvre is involved in every single event we plan and if it was not for her, our events would not be as successful as they are. Andy Donehue and the event committee planned one of the most successful golf tournaments we have had in a long time. Jon Wilmore headed up the cornhole tournament again, and it was bigger and better than last year. Many of the other Chapters in our region has seen the success of the cornhole tournament and are trying to duplicate it.

Kale Harper as our CTTC chair did an excellent job with coming up with topics for our meetings that boosted our average attendance to over 50 per meeting, an increase of 36% in attendance this year. The goal was no manufacturers or reps, and we nearly made it, as we had to call an audible on the March meeting, and Darrin Beller stepped in to provide a great presentation on ground source heat pumps.



Caleb Deck was the GAC chair this year, and was his first year in this role. He excelled in the role, meeting with government officials, planning our day on the hill, and writing articles for our newsletter that informed our membership on decarbonization and issues our industry is facing.

Jess Fitzpatrick wore the hat of social media chair, and teamed with Eli Sanchez to form the best DEI chairs in all of society in my opinion. Jess was recognized at the Region 8 CRC as best DEI chair in our region. Jess had other Chapters reaching out to her asking her questions about what software she uses for our social media posts because they were so impressed with it.

By no means last, you Dusty. Your newsletter articles reminding us of our history and the significance of our Chapter in not only the Region, but Society, are great reminders of why we are not a Premiere Chapter, but THE PREMIERE CHAPTER in society.

Dusty: Every year at the CRC, they give out the Jack Thompson Award to the best Chapter President in the Region, and it is the most prestigious regional award given to an individual. I want to say, again, congratulations on winning! Can you talk a little bit about your thoughts and emotions after they announced your name?

Scott: The guy that was presenting the award might have tipped his hand a little prior to announcing, because he had been as cool as cucumber all evening, but when presenting this award, he started stumbling over his words a little, and you could tell he was nervous. My emotions started to creep in then. When it was announced, I was somewhat surprised because I knew there were some Chapter Presidents that had a great year as well, as those Chapters always have a great year. The first thing I did was hug my wife because without her support I would not be able to pursue my passions. Everyone from our Chapter that was at our table stood up and congratulated me as I went up on stage. I was in disbelief because while we did have a really good year, I felt like I had just done my job, nothing spectacular, just the job that I volunteered to do. The first thing I said for the acceptance was while this award had my name on it, it was the effort of our Chapter that deserved the recognition, my job was simple, empower and encourage those around me to be the best ASHRAE volunteer that they could be.

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

Scott: Communicate, communicate, and communicate. You will only be as successful as the level of communication that occurs. Encourage those around you to communicate with their peers at other Chapters and with Regional leaders.

You can learn more about Scott at this link from Alvine Engineering:

<https://www.alvine.com/2024/01/31/scott-sanders-the-power-of-mentorship/>