

## Past Speakers

- 2001 **G. Wayne Clough**  
President of Georgia Tech
- 2002 **Ted C. Kennedy**  
Chairman of BE&K, Inc.
- 2003 **Philip A. Shucet**  
Commissioner of VDOT
- 2004 **Patricia D. Galloway**  
National President of ASCE
- 2005 **Hans Van Winkle**  
Director of CII
- 2006 **MG Ronald L. Johnson**  
Deputy Chief of Engineers, USACE
- 2007 **Linda Figg**  
President/CEO  
Figg Engineering Group
- 2008 **Henry Petroski**  
Professor of Civil Engineering  
Professor of History  
Duke University

## The Vecellio Distinguished Lecture



Presented by **Paul E. Torgersen**

Vecellio Construction Engineering and  
Management Program

Charles E. Via, Jr. Department of Civil and  
Environmental Engineering



A \$1 million endowment has been provided for the Construction Engineering and Management Program in Virginia Tech's Via Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering by the Vecellio Family Foundation and individual family members: the late Mrs. Leo (Evelyn) Vecellio, Sr.; Leo and Kathryn Vecellio, Jr. and their sons, Christopher and Michael; and Patricia Vecellio.

Several family members have graduated from Virginia Tech, beginning with the late Leo Vecellio, Sr. He was a 1938 civil engineering graduate of Virginia Tech who became president and CEO of Vecellio & Grogan, a construction firm founded by his father, Enrico Vecellio, and Eugene Grogan. Vecellio & Grogan became one of the largest highway construction and mining companies in the East, with more than 1,200 employees with headquarters in Beckley, West Virginia and West Palm Beach, Florida.

The college honored Leo Vecellio, Sr. in 1988 as the distinguished Alumnus for that year, and in 1999 he was inducted posthumously into the Civil and Environmental Engineering's Academy of Distinguished Alumni.

Leo Vecellio, Jr. was a 1968 civil engineering graduate and is now head of Vecellio & Grogan, Inc. and its subsidiaries. In 2006, Leo Vecellio, Jr. was also inducted into the Civil and Environmental Engineering's Academy of Distinguished Alumni. Michael A. Vecellio received his B.S. in business management from Virginia Tech in 2001. Both Michael and his brother, Christopher, are involved in the family business.

"The Vecellio family and our corporations have been involved in heavy and highway construction over 100 years," said Leo, Jr. "Construction is an ever-evolving field that needs high quality research, education and well-trained personnel. Virginia Tech has a great program that answers many of the industry's needs, and we hope that our endowment will boost the program to greater heights."

**About the Initiative.** Twenty five years ago the College of Engineering required of its entering freshmen the purchase of a personal computer. Virginia Tech was the first public university in the nation to do so. The machine was described as “portable” but weighed over 40 pounds. It had all of 256K of memory and a 9” amber monochrome monitor. By standards even a few years later, the required machine was primitive.

The decision to impose this requirement upon an entering freshman class, the selection of a vendor and a machine, and the actual distribution of hardware and software were not without some interesting moments and just a little controversy. One faculty member critical of the initial recommendation concluded, “Whatever you guys are on, you should make it available to everyone. It’ll solve all the world’s problems.”

Would this computer requirement and added cost impact enrollments? Would it produce a more marketable graduate? We knew the answer to the second question but not the first.

The time lapse from the initial recommendation to the distribution of computers to students was 15 months. We were on a fast track. This was truly a team effort of some dedicated faculty.

Two comments from the ’88 graduating class might set this in perspective: “The class of ’87 was quite jealous...they had to endure FORTRAN programming with card decks. We actually programmed our own PCs, did drafting on our PCs, and wrote papers on our PCs. And a second comment . . . . “I still have my computer and show it to my kids so they know what the first ‘laptop’ looked like (my version of walking two miles in the snow to catch the school bus)”.

In hindsight, now 25 years later, one of the principal players concluded, “How little we understood at that time how computing would evolve, how pervasive it would become in our daily lives as well as our engineering work. In that sense we were lucky rather than enlightened.”

# The Vecellio Distinguished Lecture

by

**Paul E. Torgersen**

**John Hancock Chair & Professor  
Industrial and Systems Engineering  
Virginia Tech**

**Friday, October 16, 2009  
4:00pm in 2150 Torgersen Hall**

**Lecture for the General Public:  
"The Virginia Tech Personal  
Computer Initiative**

or

**Walking Two Miles in the Snow to  
Catch the School Bus"**

**Reception to follow in Torgersen Hall Lobby:**

**5:00-6:00pm**

**Paul E. Torgersen**, past president of the university, continues to teach on a part time basis and holds the university’s John W. Hancock, Jr. Chair of Engineering.

Torgersen came to Virginia Tech as professor and head of the Department of Industrial Engineering. In 1970, he was appointed dean of the College of Engineering, a post he held for over 20 years and led the College of engineering to its place of national distinction – being ranked 17<sup>th</sup> in the nation among public and private institutions. He then served as president of the Corporate Research Center and was also interim vice president for development and university relations. He was named president of Tech in the Fall of 1993 and served until January 2000. He has taught at least one three-hour course each semester for the past 43 years.

Torgersen is a Fellow of the Institute of Industrial Engineers and the American Society of Engineering Education. In 2001 he received the Institute’s highest recognition – the Frank and Lillian Gilbreth Award and earlier, in 1991, had received ASEE’s Lamme Medal. He received Tech’s first Affirmative Action Award, the College of Engineering’s 1992 Sporn Award for Teaching Excellence and was named Virginia’s Engineering Educator of the Year in 1992.

He served from 1979-81 as chairman of the engineering Dean’s Council (the national organization of engineering deans). In 1986 he was elected to the National Academy of Engineering and more recently to the governing board of that same organization. Dr. Torgersen has authored or co-authored five books – two translated into Japanese.

With graduate degrees from Ohio State University, he also received the Benjamin G. Lamme Meritorious Achievement Medal from that same institution in 1990. With an undergraduate degree from Lehigh University, he received an honorary Doctor of Engineering from Lehigh in 1997.

In Spring, 1990, at the conclusion of a 20-year tenure as dean, engineering alumni awarded him and his wife a one-week vacation with tickets each day to the tennis finals at Wimbledon. Engineering faculty awarded his wife a one-week vacation in the Caribbean “with the engineering professor of her choice.”

During his term as dean and as president, 62,191 diplomas presented to Virginia Tech graduates were signed by Paul E. Torgersen.