

End of the Spectrum

The Pillar of PittCon

Wilks to be honored with Heritage Award

In March 1951, Paul Wilks attended his first PittCon in just its second year of existence.

Amazingly, next month will mark the 54th consecutive conference he has attended.

To put this astounding fact into better perspective, realize that in 1951, Wilks, along with co-workers Van Zandt Williams and Harry Hausdorf, represented Perkin-Elmer Corporation, displaying the company's universal monochromator and Model 12-C infrared spectrometer. The sophomore event still was establishing its significance with just 17 exhibitors, 25 booths, and a little more than 1000 attendees present. Next month in Chicago, however, there will be some 1000 exhibitors, 3000 booths, and between 25,000 and 35,000 attendees.

With all that's changed about both PittCon and the spectroscopy industry, it would be easy to overlook one aspect that hasn't experienced an exaggerated overhaul — that being Wilks and his unrelenting dedication.

Just like he was in 1951, and the five decades that have followed, Wilks, the president of Wilks Enterprise, Inc., will be at PittCon next month, happily lending his experience and wisdom, but also observing how the conference and the industry have evolved.

"The thing that has happened

is that PittCon has become more and more of an exhibits meeting rather than one where the presentation of the original papers is the most important thing," says Wilks, who assembled the earliest versions of commercial infrared spectrometers for Perkin-Elmer. "The other thing that is happening is that PittCon is becoming much more of an exhibitor-to-exhibitor meeting. If you look at the attendance, there are probably one-and-a-half exhibit persons for each attendee, and the reason is because there is a great deal of interaction between the exhibitors on the floor."

And while one may think that after all these years, Wilks might have lost enthusiasm for his annual March pilgrimage, quite the opposite has occurred. Still eager to learn about changing technologies and emerging companies, he now stands at PittCon among a collection of generations he has helped shape and educate, and hopes to learn from them.

"If someone is representing an exhibitor, they should go to PittCon to learn," Wilks says. "Not only to sell products, but to see what's going on in the industry and to see what new applications and technology are out. That's more important to me than trying to sell product."

It's this unequivocal passion that made Wilks an obvious choice to receive the third an-



nual PittCon Heritage Award next month. Jointly sponsored by PittCon and the Chemical Heritage Foundation, the award recognizes individuals whose entrepreneurial careers have shaped the instrumentation community, inspired achievement, promoted public understanding of the modern instrumentation sciences, and highlighted the role of analytical chemistry in world economies — basically, Wilks' career in an astounding nutshell.

"I'm very pleased about the award," Wilks says. "I think it's deserved so there's not much else I can say. I'm pleased to be recognized for having been around a while and for making a fair number of contributions to the field."

"I'm still busy running a company," he later adds. "So I don't feel much different than I did 30 years ago." ■

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