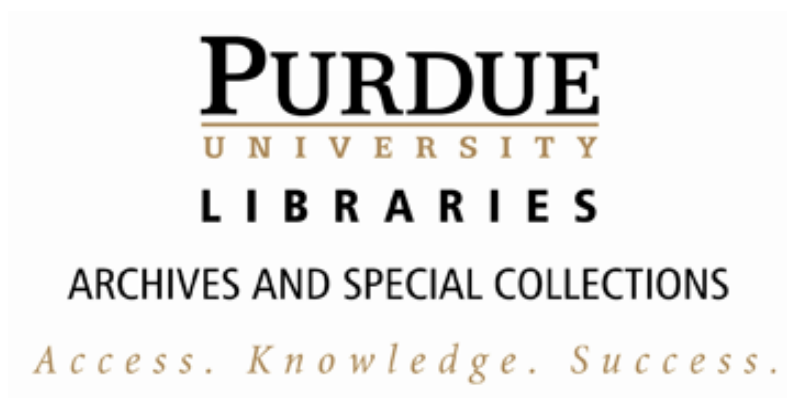


# Vincent P. Drnevich

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Conducted by Katherine Markee on May 19, 2010



The following interview was conducted with Vincent P. Drnevich (VD), professor of Civil Engineering and former head of the school from 1991-2000, for the Purdue University Oral History Program. It took place on Wednesday, May 19, 2010, in Stewart Center 263. The interviewer is Katherine Markee (KM), the Oral History Librarian.

**KM:** Good afternoon Professor Drnevich. Thank you very much.

**VD:** Good afternoon. [Laughter] Okay.

**KM:** Let's go ahead and get started. Tell us where and when you were born and your parents and the early years.

**VD:** Okay. I was born on August 6, 1940, in Wilksburg, Pennsylvania. Our family lived first of all in West Wilmerding, Pennsylvania. Wilmerding is a community associated with the Westinghouse airbrake and Wilmerding was George Westinghouse's wife's maiden name so that's why the community was named Wilmerding. We lived there for about four years and then moved up on top the hill to what is known as East McKeesport or North Versailles, Pennsylvania, and lived there. The family home still exists; a nephew now owns the home so it's got a long history of the family there.

**KM:** That's very nice.

**VD:** I'm the oldest of ten children and that was a very interesting family childhood. I'm twenty three years older than my youngest brother so there's quite a span in ages there. There are six boys and four girls and since I was first I learned about

children and taking care of children and a bunch of other things. My grandfather and father were in the construction business somewhat separately so at an early age, I learned about construction and operating equipment and doing things of that nature. So by the time I was in my mid-teens, I basically had my own crew and was involved in construction doing various kinds of small residential, commercial, and industrial kinds of jobs. And I thought that's what my career was going to be. I went through public school for the first five years and then transferred to sixth grade to a Catholic school, which was St. Aloysius, is now renamed St. Jude's and they have no school, the school's gone. And then I went to St. Peter's High School in McKeesport, Pennsylvania and that was the only Catholic high school probably within fifteen miles of where we lived and graduated from there in 1958. I had intentions of going back and working with my father and grandfather in construction and had no intentions of going to college. Our high school had twelve grades.

**KM:** Was it all boys or was it co-ed?

**VD:** Co-ed.

**KM:** Okay.

**VD:** Twelve grades, one building. We had no cafeteria, no gym, no sports, and no laboratories.

**KM:** No laboratories?

**VD:** No and the closest thing we had to a club was the Debate Club and things like that.

**KM:** That seems to be an interesting. There are many others that I talked to that Debate seemed to be very popular in high school.

**VD:** I know. [Laughter]

**KM:** Right, yeah.

**VD:** So I was in my senior year, in fact, it was in January of my senior year and did nothing considering college at all and I had a nun homeroom teacher whose name was Sister Eugenia. And she says, "You really ought to go to college" and so I thought about it and found an ad in *Popular Science* magazine. A little small ad that said bachelor's degree in Civil Engineering in twenty-seven months at Tri-State College at Angola, Indiana. I said, "Well that twenty-seven months is nothing. I could get that degree and go back and work with dad and grandfather." I showed the ad to the nun and she said, "Well I guess that would be okay but you really ought to take a look at the school first." And she says, "You know that's in Indiana and I have a nun friend who is doing graduate work at Notre Dame. I borrowed these two books from her last year, would you mind returning these books?" [Laughter]

5:00 **KM:** As long as you're there right? In the neighborhood.

**VD:** So this was mid-February. My dad and I got in the car and drove to Angola, Indiana, and talked to the people there. I hadn't applied there either and that was

the only place I had considered and I wanted to visit there so at the end of the visit would you like to come here in September and I said, "Yeah, I guess so" and so I filled out the paperwork. And then we got in the car and it was like a late Friday afternoon and looked and found that South Bend was like another ninety miles down the road, which we did not anticipate. And so we got in the car and drove and as we're going up to Notre Dame Avenue and my father sees the Blessed Mother statue on the Golden Dome and says, "You're going to school here." [Laughter] And that was all there was to it.

**KM:** I love it. The golden dome is what did it right?

**VD:** That's right. So we went to the Huddle which is a snack bar at Notre Dame and we're talking with some students and my dad introduced me and said, "This is my son, Vince. He's going to go to school here." And they said, "Fine but how do you know that? They haven't announced any acceptances yet." And my dad said, "Well we haven't applied yet" and the students said, "Well it's too late, they closed the applications over a month ago and besides, they have seven or eight applications for everyone that they accept so you're just too late, you'll have to wait until next year." So we thought about that and we got a room to stay overnight and the next morning we visited the nun friend and returned the two books and then the nun suggested that we get down to the grotto, make a visit. So we did so and as we were leaving, we decided to go up through the Administration Building and go out that way to the parking lot to get in our car. Well we got inside the Administration Building and there was the registrar's office but it was closed because it was Saturday but the side door was open. So we

knocked on the door and the registrar himself was there checking the registrations and so my father introduced me, this is my son Vince and he's going to school here. [Laughter]

**KM:** Love Dad. Dad's a big booster for you. That's terrific.

**VD:** So anyhow, the registrar says, "Your last name" and my dad says, "Drnevich." And he says, "You know, I've been through this list a lot of times and I don't recall any name like that" and he says, "I don't think he's on this list." My dad says, "I know, he hasn't applied yet, give him an application." And the registrar, who was a priest, was kind of taken aback on this and he looks at me and he said to me, "What did you score on the college entrance test?" And in all my wisdom and preparation I said, "What is that?" [Laughter]

**KM:** I love it.

**VD:** So anyhow, my father says, "Give him an application for that too." [Laughter] So it turned out that I had one chance to take that test the following Saturday and so he did give the applications for both Notre Dame and for that test.

**KM:** At home though, not up there. The college entrance at home?

**VD:** At home.

**KM:** Oh, sure.

**VD:** So what I did was to fill out the application and hand it to him. We went to the post office, filled out the application for the college entrance test to take it at home, mailed it there. And the next Saturday I took the test and we soon got a

letter saying welcome to Notre Dame to the class in the fall. [Laughter] So my dad was right. [Laughter]

**KM:** That's great.

**VD:** And it turns out that three of my brothers after me went to Notre Dame.

**KM:** Okay. Was Father Hesburgh president then?

**VD:** Father Hesburgh was president at that time, yes.

**KM:** Did you know that Father Hesburgh holds the award for the most honorary doctorates?

**VD:** Over a hundred isn't it?

**KM:** More than that of any living person today and that's incredible.

**VD:** Yeah I know that.

**KM:** And then your diploma was signed by Hesburgh just like that.

**VD:** Yes, yes.

**KM:** Is yours the parchment like Jim has? He has the parchment with all the signatures and it is all original and he has it framed.

**VD:** Yes, yes. I don't have my framed but it's the original and signed. So that was an  
10:00 experience there and so my brother a year and half younger than I also went through Civil Engineering at Notre Dame and three years later another brother came in and got an architecture degree and finally about five years later my

brother Raymond came in and got a Chemical Engineering degree. So we have four boys who graduated from Notre Dame.

**KM:** Okay. And they always tease you at the IU-Purdue game where are we going with that?

**VD:** Yeah. [Laughter]

**KM:** IU-Notre Dame rather or Purdue-Notre Dame.

**VD:** I root for Purdue. So anyhow...

**KM:** What was the campus like?

**VD:** It was much simpler than it is today.

**KM:** And of course, there were no girls.

**VD:** No girls.

**KM:** St. Mary's existed though across the street.

**VD:** Yes, they did. And because at that time you had about 5,000 male students and St. Mary's was very small, less than a 1,000 I think, so they had deals with Mundelein and other Chicago schools that they would bus them in for mixers and special events and things like that. So it was a good...

**KM:** What was your first impression walking into the stadium?

**VD:** Well I had not been a big sports fan before so it was overwhelming to say the least.

**KM:** I felt that way too at Ross-Ade. [Laughter]

**VD:** Yeah. The thing is when you have a school with that intensity and the thing I haven't seen since then was that on football Saturdays they locked the dormitories because it was expected that everybody was going to be at the stadium. And the tickets were part of your tuition at that time and so nobody stayed in the dormitory, everybody went to the game. That was just expected so you don't find that kind of participation at Purdue or any other place I think.

**KM:** Yeah, different.

**VD:** Military academies might have something similar to that.

**KM:** And that grotto is quite nice isn't it?

**VD:** Yes, it still is and it hasn't changed at all.

**KM:** And the church is magnificent there?

**VD:** And of course it's been redone and the golden dome's been re-plated several times since I've graduated from there.

**KM:** Right, right.

**VD:** So one other thing about Notre Dame that was very special in between my sophomore and junior years we were put into a surveying class that we had to take, it was a six-week summer course and then we were put into a group.

**KM:** It sounds like the Ross camp they used to have.

**VD:** Yes, it is very similar to the Ross camp and I was in a group called Party Five because we had locker five, there were four of us in that party. And that experience formed relationships among the four of us that has endured to this day. We get together frequently. For example, for my retirement party two of the four, three of the four including myself, came. One from California, one from the East Coast to be here for the party. We were in each other's weddings and so....

**KM:** Kept in touch all these years.

**VD:** All these years, yes. Just like they're family and that's the closest way to explain it.

**KM:** Where did you go in the summer? Was it right around campus?

**VD:** It was right on campus.

**KM:** Okay, I see.

**VD:** It was mostly on a farmer's field. They had rented a farmer's field to do the work or a large farming area and that was really fun too. It was really hot and sweaty and bugs all over the place but the farmer's wife did the cooking for us and we ate like you wouldn't believe. [Laughter]

**KM:** Boy you lucked out. It's like the plow sharing or whatever you know.

**VD:** So it was really a wonderful experience. So anyhow I went through Notre Dame and was ready to go back to work with my father and grandfather again and the department head there, Dr. Harry Saxe, said to me, "Vince I've got a research project with the U.S. Air Force to build a special test device, I'd like you to work

on it for me. And you can work on a master's degree and I'll pay you with a research assistantship" and I said to him, "You'll pay me to go to school?" [Laughter] So I said, "It's a deal" and I stayed on and in the summer I was an assistant instructor in the surveying camp, the same one I took three years earlier, and then in the fall I started in the master's degree and working on that research which was a wonderful experience. And my roommate of three years and in graduate school, who was one of the Party Five members also did a master's degree with me. He finished up and took a job with the Navy Civil Engineering Corps in Port Hueneme, California and I was finishing up, and this was December, and I was going to graduate in January and Harry Saxe says, "You know you really ought to go for a Ph.D." [Laughter]

15:00

**KM:** You got a lot of people looking over for you, right.

**VD:** So anyhow, Dr. Saxe said that the only place to study is at the University of Michigan under F.E. Richart Jr. He's the engineer's engineer. And so I said, "Well that sounds interesting." So I wrote a letter to Professor Richart and said, "I'm interested in coming there to graduate school and I liked to come up and make a visit" and this was late November or early December and that I could come up in the next week. I got a call back from him and he says, "Come on up and spend the day with us." So I drove up from South Bend to Ann Arbor, met him in the morning and he was the department head at the time, and talked with him for a while and he arranged for me to tour the laboratories and the campus and at the end of the day I went back and visited with him. And he said, "Well what do you

think? Are you interested in coming here?" I says, "Well I got to get accepted first." He says, "You're accepted already" and I said, "I'm coming." [Laughter]

**KM:** Wow, you got a great life. It's only gotten better.

**VD:** Yeah.

**KM:** What was your impression compared to South Bend? It was bigger though.

**VD:** It was bigger, much larger. Factor five larger or six larger, something like that. And my impression in leaving Notre Dame I felt that there was just no place in the world like Notre Dame in terms of the people and the atmosphere and what have you but when I got to Michigan I found out there are other nice people as well. Particularly in the Civil Engineering Department up there I established a number of friendships and relationships with the faculty, it was just phenomenal. So I went through and finished my doctorate at the University of Michigan and I graduated in...well something else happened along the line, I met Roxanne.

**KM:** I was going to ask if you were married at that time.

**VD:** No, I was not married at that time.

**KM:** You met her at Michigan?

**VD:** At Michigan and that's also a very good story.

**KM:** Okay. Go ahead.

**VD:** Roxanne studied at Michigan. She did undergraduate work at Russell Sage College in Troy, New York and then came to Michigan to do a master's in organic

chemistry and she finished her degree and was working as a research chemist for what was then Parke Davis in Ann Arbor, Michigan. And she and her roommate Margaret lived in a duplex and the other person on the other side of the duplex was a divorcee chemist about fifteen years their senior, his name was Art Spang. And he liked the girls and always invited them over for parties and what have you and one day they made a mistake of saying to him, "You know we're both Catholic and you seem to have only Jewish friends that you invite to your parties. Don't you know any Catholic guys?" Art says, "Well I'll think about that." [Laughter] Well the next day he had his secretary to go down to the newspaper, *The Michigan Daily* which is counterpart to our *Exponent*, and put in an ad, "Wanted: Catholic young gentlemen to meet two cultured straight young women." [Laughter]

**KM:** That's before all the...

**VD:** Oh, yeah. This was unheard of.

**KM:** Probably got a specialty running for a week or something.

**VD:** Yeah. [Laughter] So I just come back from a final exam in advanced calculus, and was really trying to unwind, and I was just reading the newspaper column by column and I saw this and showed it to the rest of the students in the office there. And I says, "Well if those girls are gutsy enough to put an ad in, the least I can do is respond to it." In the meantime, the girls saw the ad but they had no idea it was for them. And so because it said "Wanted: Catholic young gentlemen between twenty-four and twenty-eight years to meet cultured attractive Catholic women,

please send information and photograph to Box 120 in care of the newspaper.”

So about a week went by and then Art called the girls and he says, “Hi, girls. This is Art, invite me over for a drink.” And so they said, “All right, Art, you’re invited over for a drink.” And he came over with this manila envelope filled with letters and he says, “Here, girls. This is for you.” [Laughter] And those girls, of course they were furious but then they said, “Well it wouldn’t hurt to look at these letters, would it?” [Laughter]

20:00

**KM:** The ad was for us. Okeydokey and you got the envelope. Oh well you get another drink.

**VD:** Anyhow they started reading the letters and I made the...

**KM:** With the pictures? They had pictures in them?

**VD:** Some had pictures. One sent a picture of a gorilla and I didn’t send a picture, I didn’t have one handy so I just didn’t bother sending one, but I did write a two or three page note saying I graduated from Notre Dame and was studying engineering. And believe it or not, one of her first reactions in reading the letter was well this is a Notre Dame guy, I’m not sure I’m going to trust him. [Laughter] So anyhow she continued on and I kept mentioning on several times that I liked sports and her roommate just wasn’t sporty at all and so Roxanne chose to respond to my letter and she did so with a note trying to explain the situation and she gave me her phone number. So I, after getting that, called her and arranged to meet at the bulletin board at the Michigan Union across from the coffee shop 7:30 on Tuesday night. Well of course, 7:25 I was there and no Roxanne, 7:30

comes and 7:33 or 7:34 in comes Roxanne and her theory was she was not going to be on time and if she liked what she saw she would stop; if she didn't she was going to keep going. [Laughter]

**KM:** There's always that pride at play too, you know?

**VD:** Yeah. So anyhow, she said, "Do you like to read ads" and I said, "Are you Roxanne?" She says, "Yes." I said, "I'm Vince and how would you like a cup of coffee?" She said, "I'd like that" so she did an about-face to go into the coffee shop and I kind of looked over from head to toe and I said, "You're going to marry that woman."

**KM:** Right off the bat, you knew it.

**VD:** Right off the bat. Took me about six months to convince her that was the case and a year and three months after we first met we were married and married in Ann Arbor. St. Mary's...

**KM:** Where was she originally from?

**VD:** She's from New York State, near Poughkeepsie.

**KM:** Oh, okay.

**VD:** So we were married in Ann Arbor, had a very nice wedding, and then had a nice apartment there. We were married and about a year later I finished my degree and we took a job at the University of Kentucky in Lexington, Kentucky. And that again was kind of a fixed deal in that I had offers from a number of institutions but one of the persons at the University of Kentucky who was looking to work with

me had the same major professor, F.E. Richart Jr. And so he was an actually brilliant person so I felt that that was a good deal for me to go down there and work with him to really learn what there is to learn about teaching and research and other kinds of things.

**KM:** Good combination.

**VD:** Good combination. We made a fantastic team. I was at the University of Kentucky for twenty-four years.

**KM:** You had several positions while you were down there too.

**VD:** Yes. I started out at the bottom rung as an assistant professor.

**KM:** What was it like when you went down to the campus?

**VD:** Oh, it was nice. The Lexington area was very nice except at that time it still had a lot of tobacco warehouses and other areas that were not very nice. The campus itself was relatively nice and of course like all campuses, they're building like crazy and you'd have a hard time recognizing the campus today except for a few landmarks. Well I went through the ranks down there; it was a good place to be. When I became a full professor at age thirty-nine, which I can remember I never worried about that stuff, I just had fun. [Laughter]

**KM:** Right, right. And it makes it a lot easier.

**VD:** Yeah absolutely. I'm not sure it would be so much fun today, it's quite a bit different. I guess several months after I became full professor I was named the department chairmen and I had to chair the department for four years, it was a

25:00

rotating chairmanship. I was offered a second term and I decided against it because I felt I was still too young to commit myself to administration for forever more so it moved on to another person and I stepped down for about two years and then the dean of Engineering left to go to the National Science Foundation. And it was interesting in that the provost called me and said, "Would you be the acting dean for a year?" And so I was only forty-four at the time, forty-five maybe, and I thought about it and he said, "It's only for a year" and I said, "Okay." And then I took the job and did okay in it, or reasonably well, and it turned out that they had a full-fledged dean search...

**KM:** While you were the acting dean?

**VD:** While I was the acting dean. And I ended up being one of the two finalists for the permanent job. So that was interesting but I didn't get the job and in fact it was Tom Lester, who happens to be a Purdue mechanical graduate, got the job and is still dean there today and is still a very good friend of mine. The primary reason that I didn't get the job was that upper administration didn't like me. I had done some things that I shouldn't have done. [Laughter]

**KM:** Well that happens. Their eyes vary.

**VD:** An example of that, and to this day people are very pleased that I did what I did, is that we wanted to have a new civil engineering building and civil engineering was just all over place and this one lab was behind a men's restroom.

**KM:** You didn't have your own shop.

**VD:** No and the whole department was that way. Just split up and all over the place. And so I asked a faculty member, while I was dean, to write a proposal for a new civil engineering building and he did and we submitted it up to the university administration and we found out that the university submitted it to the state Council on Higher Education as their seventh priority for a new building. And this council looks at all the state universities and makes recommendations to the legislature for funding.

**KM:** Sure.

**VD:** Well by that time most of my students were now involved in professional activities throughout the state and I kind of visited it with them and they said, "We need a new civil engineering building." And so they recognized this little opportunity and they had one of their members put on the Council on Higher Education just to make sure that our voices were heard and then I got a call from him one day and he said, "Vince, the Council on Higher Education is meeting this coming Wednesday in downtown Lexington. They'll be finished about three o'clock. If you had a bus there around three o'clock we could take the council members to see your present facilities in civil engineering." So I was there with a bus and I took and showed them and that was in I guess probably March or so. And they said, "Yeah, you really do need a new facility, this is terrible." So anyhow, I didn't hear much about anything and then about a month later they made their recommendation to the state legislature that the number one priority in the entire state was the civil engineering building. [Laughter] So the president and the

provost were not very pleased, I didn't get the job, but we got a new civil engineering building.

**KM:** The ends justifies the means right?

**VD:** That's right. [Laughter] In that case there yes.

**KM:** Yeah.

**VD:** When I retired last week one of the faculty members from down there, and in fact another person as well, sent me letters with a picture of the building in it and said, "Thanks." [Laughter]

**KM:** This is yours, right?

**VD:** Yeah. So I was there and I was happy and I was back doing research after the dean's position and it turned out that again it was wonderful that I didn't get the dean's job there because there was a tremendous downturn in the economy in Kentucky at that time and the state legislature and they cutback tremendously. They had a 15-20% cut back to the university in terms of funds. And the new dean had to let a lot of people go and that would have been tough for me because I grew up with those people.

**KM:** Sure. Oh how about the building? Did that move ahead though?

**VD:** The building went ahead, yes. That was paid for and...

**KM:** Did you have to do any fundraising for that?

30:00 **VD:** I was gone by that time but...

**KM:** There was some private funds.

**VD:** There were some private funds but most of it was appropriated by the legislature, \$11 million for that building, and it covered about 95% of it so we were very fortunate there.

**KM:** That's very good.

**VD:** So I was there and then I got a call from Dean Henry Yang here, College of Engineering, saying "We would like you to apply for the position of the head of civil engineering" and he said, "Why don't you just come up?" I said, "Well I'm not interested. I'm happy here and doing good stuff" and he says, "Why don't you come up and take a look around." And so I had a daughter who was in the process of looking at colleges at the time and we had gone to look at Duke and Virginia Tech and Emory University in Atlanta and a couple other schools and she was thinking in terms of applying at Purdue and Notre Dame in the area of biology. And I said, "Well let's go up with her and we'll spend a day or so here and so we came up and Henry Yang arranged to have her visit with the dean of the College of Science and the head of the Department of Biology so she got the royal treatment while I visited around.

**KM:** Sure.

**VD:** And then at the end of the day Henry says, "What do you think?" I says, "Well it's a pretty big job and I'm not sure." He says, "Well would you at least consider being a candidate" and I said, "Well I guess that would be okay" and that was like in late September. And our daughter, instead of going back with us, went up to

South Bend and one of my Party Five members, his daughter was a senior at Notre Dame at the time, so Jenny camped out with her in her room and visited Notre Dame.

**KM:** Get her to interact with a student that was nice, right.

**VD:** And Jenny as it turned out was accepted at Notre Dame as well as being accepted at Purdue and she chose to come to Purdue and she studied biology. So she always tells people that Purdue accepted her before they accepted her dad. [Laughter] So anyhow, I got back and Henry Yang, you knew him and the kind of character he was, he was a very persistent person and all kinds of endless energy and worked, it seemed, twenty-four hours a day. But I remember, it was Thanksgiving evening about 9:00 at night, he called me at home to try to talk me into the position of coming up here as head of the school and it was 10:30 or so and I finally said, "Okay" and gave him a verbal okay to come up here as head of school. And so I said, "But it would be July 1 as soon as I could get there," I had a lot of things to do in Lexington beforehand. So the deal was that we came up and I became head on the 1<sup>st</sup> of July. We actually came up a little bit earlier, like on the 20<sup>th</sup> of June. We had bought a house, same house that we're living in now, but it wasn't ready for us yet and I had an NSF sponsored outreach program for local junior high kids in Lexington and that was the last day. It was like a Friday night and we had a banquet, and all the kids and their parents were there, and it was a fun thing. So the banquet was over and it was about 9, 10:00 at night and each of us had a car and started driving to West Lafayette, got in about 2:00 in the morning, and stayed out at the Homewood Suites overnight.

35:00

And the next morning was the civil engineering golf outing and we made some changes in that. The first thing is they called me about a month ahead of time and said, "Would you like to play in the civil engineering golf outing?" And I said, "Of course, Roxanne and I would like to play." Well it turns out they hadn't invited women to play so they scrambled to get some partners for Roxanne. They had Ellie Sutton and Sue Scholer and a person who was a softball coach at the time to play in a foursome. And it was stroke play at that time, it wasn't a scramble or anything like that, so I was dog-tired and they gave me some partners to play with who were really wonderful people. Joe Waling was one of them, Joe passed away about ten years ago or so, he and his wife Isabel were very good friends of ours after we came. And who else? There was Dick Albright who was from Indianapolis. He was an alumnus and a very strong supporter. Then we had one more person who was a technician in the surveying area, I can't think of his name right now. Dick Albright was a horrible golfer. He was my cart mate and he shot 175. And so despite that, and we were playing what was on the old North Course, I shot an eighty scratch and I won the thing so everyone said, "The new boss is in town." [Laughter]

**KM:** Be ready. [Laughter]

**VD:** Yeah be ready. So immediately after that we decided that CE Open was just too much and it really needed to be open and I asked Roxanne if she wouldn't be on the committee and then we opened up to all the alumni who could get here and students as well. And since that time it's been open and this last one, which was

the 50<sup>th</sup> CE Open, we had 140 people play and we used both the Kampen and the Ackerman courses.

**KM:** Very good.

**VD:** It was my chance to go out in style as well and so Roxanne and I and two undergraduate students from my class who were graduating were on the team and we came in 2<sup>nd</sup> so it wasn't so bad.

**KM:** Very good. That's a nice way.

**VD:** It's a nice way, yes.

**KM:** Right.

**VD:** So that's some of the things that happened and with regard to Civil Engineering that was a tough group to come into and there was a long history of difficulties I'll say within the school and in fact, several people outside the school were taking bets that I wouldn't last six months on the job. Mainly because I came from the outside and I was actually about the first or maybe the second person who came from outside to be a school head and the first person lasted several months and then was no longer head, it wasn't civil engineering it was another area. But I managed to endure for about nine years and did a number of things differently than what had been done before. First thing I think I did was to make inroads with our alumni. I established a development director for the school, it hadn't had one and none of the other schools had one at the time.

**KM:** This would have been before Jischke and all the whole...?

**VD:** Oh way before. This was 1991.

**KM:** Yeah right. All different.

**VD:** All different, yes.

**KM:** So you got Vision 21?

**VD:** I was the head of that, okay.

**KM:** Oh, right. Sure.

**VD:** I established the Civil Engineering Advisory Council which was a group of alumni of about ten to fifteen who would meet twice a year with us to advise us on things and that had not been established before. And that turned out to be a real boom to us to have communication with key alumni. The first semester I was here we had a faculty retreat and I took all the faculty on a retreat and it was a chance to brainstorm with them and they found out a little bit about who I was and I found out a little bit more about them in the process and so that was a good thing and that continues to this day. So on the development side we had an administrative director that served Harold Michael, my predecessor, and I made her the first developmental person, it's Margarita Contrene and she did a masterful job of getting that started.

**KM:** She's now under Electro...

**VD:** Electrical and Computer Engineering. Yes.

**KM:** Right.

40:00

**VD:** And we did some really neat things. For example we went after a Kresge Challenge Grant which was really tough and we got it which was we had to have to \$500,000 in direct donations and \$2 million on an endowment before they would consider us. And after we did that they matched the \$500,000 with another \$500,000 and then we had to have a whole system in place where those funds could be used continually over the years to maintain teaching within the school and they exist. We have the Kresge grants which every year sponsor about \$100,000 worth of research for the labs, predominantly undergraduate labs, and so that didn't exist before and it continues to this day. So that was another thing. I spent a lot of time out visiting with alumni and I thought it was just kind of a nice thing to do to go out and visit with them. And every year we'd make three or four or five trips and we'd go to California and hit three cities and have dinner with small groups of alumni. We'd go to Phoenix, Arizona, Houston, Texas we went every year, Atlanta and then we went east to different cities and even to places like Cincinnati to visit with alumni and just make good friends wherever we went. And it turned out that many of those friendships had been tremendously enduring.

**KM:** The regional thing and it means a lot interacting with the local alumni.

**VD:** Oh, I tell them stories and they tell me stories and have a few drinks and have dinners and go on our way.

**KM:** That's right. They feel closer when you are there.

**VD:** Oh, they feel very close and it turns out that a lot of those relationships endure to this day. For example, last Sunday Bob and Terri Bowen and Roxanne and I play golf at their club and we've been close friends with them for a long time and travel with them, play golf with them, visit with them with their place in Florida so we're part of the family.

**KM:** Right.

**VD:** And that holds true for a number of other alums that way and it turns out that at my retirement party that was the kind of message that came back that hadn't happened before where the school head went out and reached out to alums and made a positive relationship.

**KM:** That's a nice thing.

**VD:** And so I think that's probably one of the most enduring legacies that I have to this school and it really paved the way for a lot of things that happened after I stepped down as head of the school.

**KM:** Sure, right.

**VD:** So that was a very good thing.

**KM:** Did you increase the faculty during that time or not?

**VD:** Well yes and no. The total numbers didn't change very much at all, maybe up two or three, but in the nine years I was head I hired thirty-three faculty and over twenty-five of them are still here today so that was a lot of hiring to do. And then going through the promotion processes was really a big challenge for the school

and for me at that time. So that was a good thing. I was head at the time when most of the faculty started at the close of World War II. These faculty were retiring so were a lot of vacancies created that way. There were others and, to my dismay, some of them were superstars but we couldn't hold them here and they went off to Berkley or Georgia Tech. I think Georgia Tech was in our back pocket big time in terms of stealing faculty but we were still on a good relationship with them and the faculty there so I didn't feel too bad about it, we just call them Purdue South, that's all. [Laughter]

**KM:** That's a nice way of doing it. [Laughter] Do you just want to make a couple comments on your research that you were involved in over the years?

**VD:** Okay. My original research was in soil dynamics, looking at the dynamic properties of soils as might be affected by machine foundation vibrations, earthquakes, and things of that nature. And as part of my research I developed and patented some equipment to test the vibratory behavior of soils. And then I have a company which manufactures equipment and that company is called Soil Dynamics Instruments and the company is now...we've had it since 1973 and it was actually started by Bobby Hardin, my colleague at Kentucky, who started it about five years before I got to Kentucky and then he became department head before I was department head and didn't want anything to do with the company anymore so I bought him out and my wife and I run the company and have since 1973.

**KM:** Is it located down in Kentucky?

**VD:** No, it's located here. It's in our basement, okay.

**KM:** Okay.

45:00

**VD:** And we basically farm out the manufacture of the equipment and in my spare time, and I haven't done much in the last five years or so, but I would assemble and calibrate the equipment in my basement and ship it out and we have about a hundred units and they're all over the world. For example, Tsinghua University in China has one, there's Shanghai, Australia, Hong Kong. We have in Europe, Scandinavia, India, places like that so it's a pretty good distribution.

**KM:** Global.

**VD:** Global distribution and the equipment is still working to this day. I get a call every so often or an e-mail saying, "Would you have a spare part for this piece here?" And "we're still testing it at the Norwegian Geotechnical Institute," which is one of the premier laboratories in the world. They have two of them and they tell me that it's the busiest piece of equipment in their laboratory.

**KM:** Oh, that's great. That's nice to hear.

**VD:** And I'm a consultant now to upgrade the software for it so that's one of the things I'll be doing this summer. So that's my research and that kind of continued while I was here and then in the early 1990s, I saw a paper in a journal about time domain reflectometry which is use of electromagnetic waves to determine the water content of soils. And I looked at that and said, "There's a lot more information in there than they're getting out of it" and so I started research on that

in the mid-1990s. I've had five, soon to be six, doctoral students complete their research on that. We have six U.S. patents on the process and the technology has an ASTM standard and has won for us a number of awards. It's licensed to a firm in Georgia and it's in production and for sale worldwide right now. And in fact before coming over here I'm working on the next generation of the software for that, the calibrations to make it even more practical and reliable than it is at the present time and that will keep me busy, stuff on the back burner that needs to be done. So that has been really fun and it's called time domain reflectometry and we hosted an international symposium here in 2006, TDR 2006, and we had people from thirty-eight countries come to come participate in our symposium and it was really fun. The names that are classic in all of literature associated with this technology were here and they are now personal friends. [Laughter]

**KM:** That's very good.

**VD:** So that's basically research.

**KM:** Yeah. Then after you stepped down then you went back to teaching?

**VD:** Teaching yes...go ahead.

**KM:** Go ahead.

**VD:** While I was head of the school, I was very keenly observing our capstone civil engineering design course. The curriculum in civil engineering had a major revision back in 1962 and this course was put in at this time and it was taught at that time as a project type course. And I watched the way the course was being

taught and participated in it and looked at the presentations and pitched in a little bit but not much with regards to the course and I thought it could be done better. And the thing that I didn't like that it was a capstone course which means it's supposed to pull everything together. Well the project did but they had five or six students on a team and as soon as they got this team together, they said, "You're doing the structures, you're doing the environmental, you're doing the geotech, you're doing the hydraulics." And so these kids were just doing the stuff and never getting to see the overall project being put together.

**KM:** They were doing just the segments of it.

**VD:** Segments of it and wouldn't get the overall picture of what was done and they didn't get much in terms of the estimating, scheduling, and how you go about getting a job to begin with. And I made suggestions but of course who listens to the school head when you make suggestions like that. So I stepped down in June of 2000 and went on sabbatical at Carnegie Mellon University and had an absolutely wonderful experience there and still am close to the people on the faculty. I came back in January and they said to me, "Guess who is teaching senior design this spring?" [Laughter]

50:00

**KM:** Roxanne.

**VD:** I said "Wonderful." So I've taught it every spring for the last ten years and I started almost immediately making it the way I wanted to but I've been refining it ever since. And we have three and soon to be four publications on the course in the American Society for Engineering Education. It is clearly our signature course

in civil engineering and the students come out of there with an appreciation of the whole project and what it takes. To give you an idea I start off with issuing a RFP to them and that guides the entire semester, request for proposals. And so I form the teams and I use an optimization process in forming the teams so they have all the skills that they need. We have the Olson lab, which is part of the Kresge Challenge, which is dedicated to senior design and then we have access to lots of people from the engineering practice community that come in and not only share their ideas but they help us in the process of reviewing the proposals and reviewing the presentations, etc. About four years ago, I introduced LEED, the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, and that is something that is being very hot and every student should know about coming out of civil engineering, but it is only now being done in the senior design. So with that I felt that the students, and by the way the students coming out of the course while they are in a course they don't like it because they work so awfully hard and I get much more out of them than they're willing to give, but nonetheless afterwards they say, "Wow, what a course." [Laughter] And at graduation I could hear them and their reviews that say "this is the best course I ever had" or "this was worth all the effort."

**KM:** That's what you want to hear.

**VD:** Yeah. So that's the course and I decided since I'm so passionate about it, I got to do something about that. So one of the things that Roxanne and I did is that we visited with Gordon Shavers in the University Development Office and established an endowment for that course so the senior design now at Purdue is

the first endowed course at the university. And so we started the endowment with a small minimum amount but then we put in a trust fund that upon our demise it will be handsomely funded so students in the future will have the opportunity to continue to get a good experience in senior design. So that's a passion. I've taught as well the soil mechanics and soil dynamics courses and have had a lot of fun in that. I've had a number of very wonderful graduate students as well as undergraduate coming out of the program that are still very close. Several of my graduate students came from very far and others who couldn't come sent videos to me for the retirement celebrations so that was very nice.

**KM:** Tell us a little bit about that for the researchers. How did that come about? The dinner.

**VD:** The dinner. Oh well that was a...

**KM:** You knew it was coming.

**VD:** Oh, yes. [Laughter] One of the things I did in 2003 was to take a leadership role with our colleagues in forming the Purdue Geotechnical Society. And this was a society of faculty and alumni who were interested in geotech to get together for a one day workshop and then that workshop would have at the end of the workshop the G.A. Leonards Lecture. Gerry Leonards was the very famous member of our faculty here.

**KM:** Did the work on the Pisa thing after he retired?

**VD:** The Pisa Tower, that's correct. So in honor of him we created the G.A. Leonards Lecture and this is the eighth year that we've had it and it's been a fantastic success. Doesn't make much money, barely breaks even, but success in terms of having people back and participate.

**KM:** It keeps his name up in the front.

**VD:** It keeps it up in the front. Well last October my colleagues informed me at lunch one day that I was no longer in charge. [Laughter] And then slowly they told me  
55:00 that they were dedicating the workshop this year to me.

**KM:** I saw that. I was going to ask you about that. That's very nice.

**VD:** The theme was Making Waves, which was kind of the thing that I've done all my life. [Laughter] So the people on the program were either colleagues of mine, teachers of mine, or students of mine and it was a phenomenal day in terms of the workshop. The 8<sup>th</sup> Leonards Lecture was given by Richard D. Woods. Richard Woods was my big brother at Notre Dame Days, while I was a senior he was finishing his master's degree and we teamed up on a project together. It was a total failure but we got to be good friends. And then when I showed up at Michigan he showed up a couple months later so we went through the doctoral program and he and his wife Dixie were very instrumental in helping me court Roxanne while I was there. They were in our wedding, or he was, and we retained close relationship ever since. He stayed on at the University of Michigan; I went to the University of Kentucky and then came here to Purdue. He became head of the school at Michigan while I was head of the school here at

Purdue. So two classmates, two Big 10 schools, and he and his wife Dixie are godparents to our Julie and so it's a nice relationship. So he gave the 8<sup>th</sup> G.A. Leonards Lecture which was very nice and a very difficult problem that he tackled and was well received. And then that evening they had a reception and dinner and after the dinner they had a number of people come up and say nice things and that was precious.

**KM:** That's very nice. Super. I was going to ask you about your awards. One of the ones, the most recent, is that you're getting ASCE Distinguished Member and you're going to be installed this October.

**VD:** In October, yes.

**KM:** Congratulations. That's very nice.

**VD:** Thank you.

**KM:** And then the workshop you talked about. The other nice thing is that Hardin-Drnevich-Huang Professorship in Geotechnical Engineering at the University of Kentucky and it was in honor of the three people who overlapped at Kentucky by twenty-four years. That's very nice.

**VD:** Yes. When I left there, I left in very good relationship with them. I mean they were proud to see me move on and I maintain contacts with them ever since. When I left I had twenty-four years of experience and I was fifty-one years of age and you add those two together it comes to seventy-five. So I was eligible not only to retire from the University of Kentucky but to obtain emeritus status so I have

been for the last nineteen years professor emeritus at the University of Kentucky. [Laughter] And the work of Hardin, Huang, and myself basically put Kentucky on the map in terms of the geotechnical area so they thought it would be a fitting thing to create a professorship in our honor. And so they did and it's funded now and I contributed of course to the professorship as did Hardin and Huang and this coming fall they will be naming the first professor.

**KM:** Very nice. You've gotten quite a few awards and I thought the University of Kentucky Alumni Association Great Teacher Award while you were there and the University of Michigan Alumni Society and Notre Dame's Engineering Awards. See all the schools remember, you made an impact right?

**VD:** [Laughter] I didn't burn my bridges.

**KM:** And the George Wadlin Award for Distinguished Service in Civil Engineering. That's nice. And now I want to ask you about the Vinny Leadership Award, that's on the MathCounts, you'll have to share about that.

**VD:** No it's not on MathCounts. Vinny Leadership Award does exist, okay?

**KM:** Okay.

**VD:** Mid 1990's there was an organization called LeaderShape, they still exist.

**KM:** LeaderShape, right.

**VD:** And LeaderShape was founded at the University of Illinois and a group of students from Purdue went to a weeklong LeaderShape program and came back all enthused about having that program here. They were told in order for them to

1:00:00

be a recognized student organization they had to have a faculty advisor and they went shopping. And it turned out that they knocked on my door and asked to be the advisor. [Laughter] And this was while I was head of the school so I was a little reluctant to take on the job but the importance of leadership was something that was pretty strong in my mind so I said, "Okay." So they said, "You don't have to do anything, we just need someone to sign the papers, we'll do all the work" and so they did surprisingly. They raised money; I think they had to raise \$45,000 for a weeklong workshop. They had forty students or so in it and then they came to me and said, "Would you like to come to the workshop? We like to invite you to be one of the..." and they have two main facilitators for the whole week. And then they have clusters and they needed some cluster facilitators and so I said, "Okay." And it was up at Camp Tecumseh and it was a nice experience. And so it was tough and here I am I was fifty-five at the time and including the instructors the next oldest person was thirty-eight so I was clearly out of my element but I hung in there. [Laughter] And in fact after that year, it was in August as I recall, those students came back all fired up and they just absolutely ran everything in engineering on the campus. I was really impressed and Dick Schwartz, Dean of Engineering at the time, I can remember him saying and shaking his head, he said that program has done something that really transformed the students in this college. [Laughter]

**KM:** That's right.

**VD:** And so I went to two other times but I didn't stay the full week those times but I'd go up for the sessions and one of the sessions the second year they decided to

create the Vinny Award. And the reason behind that is that in the cluster group they were calling me Vinny and they could do that and in fact that was a code that we had. If I saw any of those students on campus and they said, "Hi, Vinny." I knew they were LeaderShape graduates.

**KM:** Because of the code.

**VD:** The code, yes. And so they decided to create the Vinny Award and that was very nice. I've done think they've continued and I think what happened... Well to my dismay, LeaderShape had kind of fallen apart on the campus here. I think it's in the process of getting resurrected but it's not there yet, and what happened was that the engineering students, it was predominantly engineering students, and it was really very well run as engineers might do. But then they decided to open it up to ag and science and then liberal arts students got involved in it and it got to the point where those people who had the responsibility for running it didn't take those responsibilities seriously. They didn't raise the funds, they didn't put the program together and it dwindled and that was a tragic loss for the school. I was faculty advisor for three years and then someone else took it over because I was too busy to give them the service that they needed. But I would like to see that come back and that really has an impact on people's lives.

**KM:** Yeah maybe it won't. Sometimes those things get down and they never get up again.

**VD:** Yeah, they're cyclic in nature, yes.

**KM:** Right yeah. And then you're involved in many associations. Do you have a favorite Purdue tradition?

**VD:** A Purdue tradition. Well I've got lots of them.

**KM:** Okay. You can have more than one.

**VD:** Yeah. We like to go to the football games, we're diehard women's basketball fans and enjoy following the ladies' basketball. The CE Open is very strong in my heart. In fact, I was at a professional society meeting in Indianapolis, gave my presentation, snuck away to do the Civil Engineering Golf Open, and went back for the evening program that I was involved in so that's a strong tradition that I like. Civil Engineering does a number of nice things. They have the Faculty Breakfast for Alumni...

**KM:** You do that for homecoming don't you?

**VD:** Homecoming. They used to do it first of all on Gala Week then they decided to do it both on Gala Week and at homecoming in the fall and then I think Gala Week kind of disappeared now and it's going to be only at homecoming but that's a nice thing.

**KM:** That's a long tradition. People used to talk about that years ago.

**VD:** Yes, and it's really nice. And a lot of people like Shelia and Vic Klinker will come to that and others...

**KM:** It's known.

**VD:** It's known yes and that's a good place to...

**KM:** To go right? You can check that out.

**VD:** Right, right. So those are really good traditions.

**KM:** Yeah. How about an outstanding event?

**VD:** Well this retirement celebration has to be one of those that are exceptionally large in my mind. I was very pleased when we dedicated the Bowen Lab, I  
1:05:00 thought that was a milestone for the school and really put us up.

**KM:** Great location.

**VD:** Great location, super faculty, the facility is spectacular and I take a lot of people down there to give personal tours of the facility so I'm very proud of that.

**KM:** Good. Now the next stage. Tell us in closing and I'll leave it up to you.

**VD:** Okay. Well next stage is I'm always in transition and I never work. [Laughter]

**KM:** I understand.

**VD:** So for example, there's several things. I got a lot of things on that back burner that need to be published, particularly the TDR stuff, and I'd like to get that into print. Just today, I got the message that my ASTM standard for that technology has to be upgraded and that's perfect timing so I will be doing that.

**KM:** You got time to devote to it.

**VD:** I got time to devote to it. So that's one thing. I'm still heavily involved in professional and technical activities. For example, I'm on the State Board of Registration for Professional Engineers and tomorrow I'll just spend all day in Indianapolis at a board meeting. I'm involved with the Indiana Society of Professional Engineers and in fact just this last weekend that the National Society of Professional Engineers has named me the Joseph A. Rhodes mentor of the year for the whole society.

**KM:** All right, congratulations.

**VD:** So that caught me by surprise but it's...

**KM:** Those are good surprises.

**VD:** Yeah. So I have a strong affiliation with the engineers in practice and would like to see them bootstrap and be successful in the process so that's one aspect of what I'll be doing. So I'll be spending a day or two here. The grad students just love me because I help them with their stuff in the labs. When I leave here, I'm going to the lab because a student has a problem and just before coming here another student walked in and he needed some special holes cut in Teflon and he didn't know how to do it and it wasn't an easy thing to do.

**KM:** It's the student contact that you like to keep around.

**VD:** Yeah right and I think that will maintain for a while. Then on the other front, my basement at home and my office here at the university are both disasters I guess is the best way to describe it. You understand that? Okay. [Laughter]

**KM:** Others have the same thing.

**VD:** Yeah. So I've got to put a plan in place to de-accumulate, if you will, a lot of things and I'm thinking in terms of giving most of the books and other things and keeping maybe some of the papers and research stuff so that's high on the priority list. And then my golf game's atrocious so I need to work on that. And then finally, and most importantly, I have two grandsons and then a set of twins on the way so they need me to help them find about the wonders of God's creation. So that's going to be...

**KM:** [Laughter] That sounds great.

**VD:** In fact, Friday morning we're going to Champaign-Urbana, Illinois where two of our grandsons now live. One is a month and a half old and the other one is going on three so we need to spend a little time with them. We'll just spend two days and then come on back.

**KM:** Sure.

**VD:** And then our daughter in Chicago is having twins in September so that will take some of our time.

**KM:** Be a busy time, right.

**VD:** Be a busy time for us as well, yes. Good. So that's the future, I don't think I'm going get bored.

**KM:** I don't think so and I really, really appreciate this opportunity. I really thank you very much.

**VD:** You're welcome.

**KM:** Thank you very much.

**VD:** I hope I didn't...Did I...?

**KM:** No. Absolutely great.

**End of Interview**

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