In Tribute to

Michael W. O'Neill

(1940-2003)

Michael W. O'Neill was a world class contributor to the technology of deep foundations and was at the height of his creative abilities at his untimely death. Expressions honoring him have come from around the world and the geotechnical community will miss his presence now and into the future.

It was my great good fortune to be his mentor during his graduate years when he set forth on his many years of productive work. During that time he was smart, energetic, pleasant, patient, well-liked, and an inspiration among his fellow students. Mike's capacity for work was unexcelled; his dissertation of 750 pages in two volumes remains a standard of careful and diligent effort.

Mike was a leader during his years on the campus at the University of Houston. He served a term as Chairman of the Department of Civil Engineering and was named the Hugh Roy & Lillie Cranz Cullen Distinguished Professor of Civil Engineering. His research, accomplished with graduate students from many corners of the globe, led to numerous awards: M.S. Kapp Award, ASCE, 2003; Distinguished Service Award, Deep Foundations Institute, 2002; The 34th Terzaghi Lecture, ASCE, 1998, entitled "Side Resistance in Piles and Drilled Shafts" (published in the Journal of Geotechnical & Geoenvironmental Engineering, Vol. 127, No. 1, 2001); Professional Service Award, International Association of Foundation Drilling, 1990; W.L. Huber Research Prize, ASCE, 1986; and State-of-the-Art in Civil Engineering Award, ASCE, 1984. He was slated to receive the award of GeoHero from the Geo-Institute of ASCE in 2004, and had been nominated for membership in the National Academy of Engineering.

The proposed citation in his nomination to NAE read: "For contributions to the design of deep foundations through an understanding of the impact of construction procedures on foundation performance." When his sudden death was being discussed with one of his research sponsors, the company president in great distress said: "But who will we go to now for fundamental research on the behavior of drilled shafts under axial load?" Many of us can ask the same question: who will we go to for a pleasant, quiet, thoughtful discussion of vexing problems in foundation engineering? Who, indeed, can replace Mike?

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