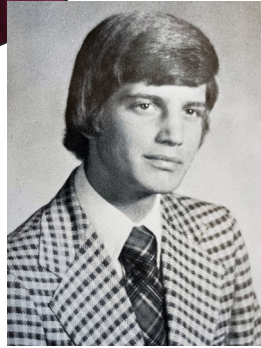


Jack Bedessem Trihydro

EBJ Lifetime Achievement Award, 2022



Jack Bedessem, P.E., graduated from South Dakota State University (SDSU) with a BS in civil engineering with an emphasis in water/wastewater. Prior to joining Trihydro Corporation, he worked as a wastewater treatment plant operator for Brookings, South Dakota (1980-1982) and the Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) Water Quality Division (1982-1988). Jack joined Trihydro in 1988 as employee number 12.



Jack Bedessem, Yearbook, 1976

At Trihydro, Jack served in a variety of roles including project engineer, project manager, chairman of the board, vice president of engineering, executive vice president, and chief financial officer, leading up to his appointment as president/chief executive officer (CEO) in 2004. In 2020, after 16 years as president/CEO, Jack transitioned into supporting special projects as a director and senior advisor.

Jack remains a senior consultant with Trihydro. He has over 40 years of experience in the engineering/environmental industry and was a registered professional engineer in 16 states. Jack serves and has served on a number of boards and has been recognized for his contributions to industry and community, receiving the

Laramie Economic Development Corporation Business Person of the Year Award in 2005 and the U.S. Small Business Administration Wyoming Business Person of the Year Award in 2015.

Trihydro, an engineering and environmental consulting firm founded in 1984 in Laramie, Wyo., has grown to over 500 employees and 21 offices. Since 2006, the Wyoming Business Journal has ranked Trihydro as the state's largest engineering firm. Zweig White ranked Trihydro as a Hot Firm for 10 consecutive years (2004-2013). Additionally, Trihydro has been listed as one of Engineering News-Record's Top 200 Environmental Firms for 16 consecutive years, was recognized as one of America's Safest Companies in 2009, and was presented with the 2019 Best Overall Safety Culture award by the EHS Daily Advisor.

EBJ: How and why did you get into the environmental industry?

JB: While working my way through the engineering program at SDSU, the chemical, physical and biological processes associated with water and wastewater always made more sense to me than structures and mechanics. My amazement as a young operator watching what came in and what went out of the City's wastewater treatment plant certainly stimulated my interest in the environmental field. The early 1980s was also a stirring time in the environmental field with numerous potential and undeveloped opportunities stemming from new environmental statutes and regulations.



Jack in 1986

The environmental industry has matured and changed dramatically over the years and is still evolving today. Working as an engineer in this business is fairly unique in that you have opportunities to remediate, enhance,

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Jack giving a presentation during the company's 30th anniversary celebrations, 2014

protect, and preserve the environment, as well as improve human health and the quality of life. Given all the challenges we are facing today, job satisfaction and attempting to build a better place one project at a time should be a bright spot for all of us.

EBJ: We all need help along way. Did you have mentors or supporters who helped you to succeed?

JB: I have been very fortunate to have had several key supporters in my life and career, beginning with my parents who always encouraged me, coached me to "use my head," and instilled the importance of trying to do the right thing (even though I didn't always listen). I would also be extremely remiss if I did not acknowledge the constant cheerleading and unwavering support that my wife Marge has provided over the past 36 years. Being in a leadership position in the environmental and engineering consulting business is not easy and would not have been possible without her support.

My first real mentor was my boss at a high-end restaurant, where I worked as a busboy through high school. My next mentors were my bosses when I joined the professional world as a young engineer. As I was ramping up my career in the consulting business, a favored client of mine and one of my peers at Trihydro also became important mentors. Probably the most common attribute of each of these mentors was having the faith to give me a second chance when I messed up and telling me to just do what I thought was the right thing to do.

EBJ: What did you do before joining Trihydro?

JB: I started mowing lawns when I was 12 years old and wore out at least three of my dad's lawnmowers. Subsequently, I worked various part-time jobs through high school and college. There were not a lot of engineering jobs available when I graduated from SDSU in 1980. I sent out hundreds of resumes and received very little response, so I took a job as a wastewater treatment plant operator for the City of Brookings, SD (1980-1982). I probably learned more engineering working the night shift at the wastewater plant than I ever did in the classroom. I also worked as a district engineer for the Wyoming DEQ/Water Quality Division (1982-1988), gaining considerable regulatory and technical experience in water, wastewater, solid/hazardous waste, environmental remediation, permitting, and compliance. These early opportunities, and particularly the mentors I learned from in these jobs, provided a great foundation for a wonderful career in the people-based consulting business.



Jack at the University of Wyoming Marian H. Rochelle Gateway Center project

EBJ: When you took the helm as president and CEO in 2004, how big was Trihydro and what plans did you have to grow the company?

JB: When I was appointed president and CEO in 2004, we had about 140 employees. At that time, we had a great leadership and management team that just needed to align on some direction to move forward. Trihydro was not widely known, but we were positioned well in solid markets with strong industry relationships and had a great foundation of good people and technical experience to build on. We attempted a strategic

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planning session in 2000 that does not bring back fond memories but did provide us with a framework for our first real organization structure, as well as alignment on the desire to grow and need to diversify. Five years later, we rekindled the confidence to try another strategic planning session, which we have continued annually ever since. Strategic planning, building relationships, and aligning our team on plans for growth and diversification have been key to getting us to where we are at today. Today, we have about 500 employees with 21 branch offices nationwide.

EBJ: What have been your biggest challenges and triumphs as leader of Trihydro?

JB: The company is now operating stronger than ever as a closely held firm with its third generation of owners and leaders, which we consider an achievement. Like every business, Trihydro has been through a number of ups and downs over the years. Fortunately, most of the ups and downs resulted in valuable lessons learned and positive outcomes. One of the biggest weaknesses we identified in the early 2000s was that more than 50%

of our revenue came from one client and industry, which was scary for obvious reasons. As such, our primary focus was to build out our seven business units and continue our drive for strategic diversification, which is still part of our journey today.

During my first four years as president/CEO, the economy was strong and our business unit leaders had every business unit rocking, and life was good. Then we all know what happened in 2008... the Great Recession impacted almost every client, market, and business in the country. Our response included a special strategic



Trihydro commemorative saddle, presented upon Jack's retirement as President and CEO in 2020



Jack covering ground on horseback at an AML inventory project

planning session and implementing several counterintuitive initiatives, such as going on a hiring spree and proactively helping our clients reduce budgets and defer projects. These measures resulted in more work coming our way and not having to lay off any staff, ultimately affording us reasonable growth and profitability, and the ability to emerge from the calamity healthier with stronger internal and client relationships.

The process of special strategic planning, aligning our business unit leaders, and proactively implementing unique initiatives has helped us get through challenging times over the years. We also applied this approach to work our way through the past couple of years of the

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Jack with his dogs on a hunting trip in South Dakota, 2020

COVID-19 pandemic. Again, avoiding the need to lay off staff and evolving some working arrangements that should further enhance employee satisfaction. Having great partners (at work and home) and great employees is the real key to addressing challenges and continuing success.

EBJ: Under your watch, in 2005 Trihydro adopted a cultural ethos called the Code the West. Why did you choose this code, and what are its tenets?

JB: Thanks for this question, because I think it has been one of our keys to evolving as a company that we are all very proud of. When I stepped into the president/CEO role in 2004, I began looking for a way to communicate with employees and clients about how we wanted to do business. My wife and I attended a fundraiser in early 2005 where a former University of Wyoming football coach was giving a keynote presentation based on the Code of the West, which had been recently published in the book *Cowboy Ethics* by James Owen. After taking numerous notes on the back of a napkin, I said: “That’s

it.... It’s what I’ve been looking for to nurture our business practices and philosophy.” We tracked down the author and got his permission to use the tenets described in the book, which include:

- Live Each Day With Courage.
- Take Pride In Your Work.
- Always Finish What You Start.
- Do What Has To Be Done.
- Be Tough, But Fair.
- When You Make a Promise, Keep It.
- Ride For The Brand.
- Talk Less and Say More.
- Remember That Some Things Aren’t For Sale.
- Know Where To Draw The Line.

We have built on the Code of the West over the years, adding “Leave It Better Than You Found It” as an 11th tenet. We also issue Code of the West awards to peer-nominated employees every year, which have turned out to be our most coveted staff recognitions.

There have been people along the way who thought the Code of the West was hokey and you had to be a cowboy to appreciate them. However, communicating the Code of the West to clients, prospective clients, and employees has helped us win new work, turn around troubled projects, maintain relationships, and foster our business philosophy. We actually had one of our young engineers from Wyoming write an article in our newsletter, which went out to all our coast-to-coast employees, advocating a new title: *The Code of the West, East, North, and South*.

EBJ: What boards or nonprofits do you serve or support?

JB: Since 2005, I have served on the boards of a number of industry and community organizations, such as the Wyoming Oil & Gas Industry Safety Alliance, Iverson Memorial Hospital Foundation (IMHF), Center for Cowboy Ethics and Leadership, and the Laramie Economic Development Corporation (LEDC). We also served as co-chairs for the 2016 IMHF La Grande Fleur and co-chairs for the 2010 Albany County United Way campaign. Additionally, I continue to provide support to several other industry, community, and youth service organizations (e.g., 12 years with the Daniels

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Fund Scholarship Program). A recent highlight was facilitating a strategic planning retreat for the Board of the Cathedral Home for Children (CHC) in Laramie, WY. For over 100 years, the CHC has served as a hub of care for youth mental health in Wyoming and surrounding states. CHC focuses on meeting the needs of youth and families through prevention, outreach, education, and community-based care.

EBJ: You stepped back recently from being president and CEO but continue as a senior advisor and on the board of directors. Do you ever see yourself fully retiring?

JB: I have really enjoyed continuing on the board and as a senior advisor for Trihydro. It has been fun to have time to focus on special projects, such as drafting and updating our corporate governance, assessing and helping structure potential acquisition opportunities, and continuing to mentor several of the company's upcoming professionals. It has also been refreshing to not have to deal with emergency or unpleasant issues, which would always seem to come up at the most inopportune times, as well as having a bit more free time to spend with my wife and catch up on personal projects. Whether it is continuing to work on Trihydro special projects or tending to our agricultural and rental operations, I cannot imagine ever retiring or even envision what is real retirement.

EBJ: Do you have hobbies or special interests?

JB: Wyoming is a great place from which to work and do business. Living in Wyoming also offers a lot of opportunities for outdoor activities – sometimes, more than one has time for, even when only working part-time. My favorite downtime activities are fly fishing one of our blue ribbon streams with my wife and upland bird hunting with our two yellow labs. We are also learning and relearning to play golf, but cannot yet say we have conquered or always enjoy the sport. We would be happy to host any of you who may want to experience the place where we live, work and play.



Jack with his wife, Marge, Platte Valley, WY, 2019