

Celebrating Innovation: The ESWP's 125th Anniversary

By Chriss Swaney
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The century's smartest and most innovative leaders queued up Oct. 26, 2005 to spend an evening with famed historian David McCullough at the 125th anniversary of the Engineer's Society of Western Pennsylvania (ESWP).

More than 1,100 engineers, educators, lawyers, physicians, politicians, corporate leaders, journalists and students streamed into Pittsburgh's David L. Lawrence Convention Center to salute ESWP's long history of innovation and community involvement.

WQED Producer Rick Sebak, who created a special history video for the ESWP anniversary dinner, was the event "M.C."

"I'm both pleased and proud to be part of this history-making event where we are really celebrating our past, present and future," said Sebak. "Very few people understand what engineers really do, and how they impact our lives," he said.



David McCullough

Prior to the gala dinner, replete with military honor guard and a stirring rendition of the national anthem, McCullough spent time with a handful of ESWP guests during a VIP reception at the Senator John Heinz Pittsburgh Regional History Center in the city's colorful strip district.

At the reception, McCullough, autographed his latest book, "1776," and admonished attendees to get children interested in history.

"We are in danger of being a country of historical illiterates," McCullough warned. "We have amnesia about our history."

The two-time Pulitzer Prize winner prodded the crowd to learn more about learning. "I'm convinced that we learn by struggling to find the solution to a problem on our own, with some guidance, but getting in and getting our hands dirty and working it."

Reception attendees flocked to

"We are in danger of being a country of historical illiterates"

— David McCullough

have books signed and photos taken with Pittsburgh's favorite native son.

"I think this event is a great kickoff for our next phase of activities designed to entice tomorrow's youth to study more engineering and science," said Anthony M. DiGioia, Jr., co-chair of the ESWP 125th anniversary and head of



DiGioia, Gray & Associates, LLC.

The ESWP, for example, is partnering with the Carnegie Science Center to produce a selection of programs that focus on middle and high school aged students designed to create interest in engineering, science and architectural careers.

In addition to beefing up interest in engineering careers, the ESWP is developing a special exhibit to be featured at the History

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Center in 2008 and a new history book about the association's 125 years of public service.

"Engineering and innovation are two key elements that make Pittsburgh such a special place," said Andrew E. Masich, president and chief executive officer of the Senator John Heinz Pittsburgh Regional History Center. "This is a place where big ideas became reality."

McCullough was quick to point out that most of the steel used in World War II was forged in Pittsburgh. "We were aptly dubbed, 'the arsenal of democracy.'"

"Aviator Charles A. Lindbergh's plane propeller was made here, and the boat that launched the famous

journey of Lewis and Clark also came from Pittsburgh," McCullough said.

In fact, many of the ESWP founding members were icons in the turn-of-the-century where men lived in booming, anarchic times and thrived on them. Industrialist Andrew Carnegie, whose steel furnished the sinews of America's growing communities, played an important role in the development of ESWP.



Anthony M. DiGioia Jr., Ph.D., P.E.

And the Carnegie legacy continues. Carnegie Mellon University faculty members Jay Apt, James H. Garrett, Jr., and Deborah A. Lange serve on the 125th anniversary planning committee.

"This is a very proud evening for engineers because the profession has played such an important part in the life of this region," said Jared L. Cohon, president of Carnegie Mellon University.

James Roddey, a principal of the Hawthorne Group and a member of the 125th ESWP anniversary planning committee, said that we often forget to credit the role engineers play in all we do. "The building of Pittsburgh took inspiration and

guidance from engineers who labored long and hard to get it done.” Roddey said.

But the engineering profession is changing. As globalization and competition for jobs intensifies, engineers are reinventing how they hone skills to tackle tomorrow’s urban and environmental challenges.

“I guess you could call me the poster boy for this change,” said Alex G. Sciulli of Mellon Financial Corp. and co-chair of the 125th ESWP anniversary committee.

“It’s important for our country not to lose our technology edge when it comes to engineering and the sciences,” he said. “Our anniversary celebration is really as big as it gets for engineers who are usually the folks doing all the work behind the scenes with scant recognition,” said Sciulli.

Michael G. Bock of Schnader, Harrison, Segal and Lewis LLP and an ESWP board member, said the entire anniversary kick off is designed to get a broader audience excited about engineering.

That excitement culminated in a rousing welcome for McCullough as claps and cheers could be heard when the nation’s best narrative historian stepped up to the convention center podium. His familiar face and easy manner immediately helped the audience settle into an hour’s worth of wit and wisdom.

“If you learn anything tonight it’s that the solution of the problem is often in the problem itself,” McCullough said. “It’s not just intelligence; it takes leaders.”

Throughout his latest book, “1776,” a cadre of important military and political figures crop up to challenge and augment McCullough’s own bullish faith in America’s timeless resilience.

“When I read in my research that the British army had landed 32,000 troops – and I had realized, not very long before, that Philadelphia only had 30,000 people in it – it practically lifted me out of my chair. They landed an army bigger than the entire population of the largest city in the country,” McCullough said.

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Alex G. Sciulli, P.E.

He compared the early struggles endured by America’s patriots with all the challenges civil engineers made when they built both the Brooklyn Bridge and the Panama Canal.

“I salute all of you, and your ability to solve problems,” McCullough said. “You can learn from these genuine American heroes. Because a handful of very brave people refused to see a bleak history, we are the beneficiaries. Without them, The Declaration of Independence would have been that only, a declaration, words on paper.”

In a crowded and productive ca-

reer, McCullough has been an editor, essayist, teacher, lecturer and familiar presence on public television. He was also the narrator’s voice in the recent movie *Seabiscuit*.

Following his talk, McCullough autographed more books and joked with the crowd, who meandered between the book signing and a successful ESWP silent auction.

The ESWP event was made possible by a variety of generous corporate sponsorships and the hard work of ESWP staff led by David Teorsky, editor-in-chief of *Pittsburgh Engineer*.

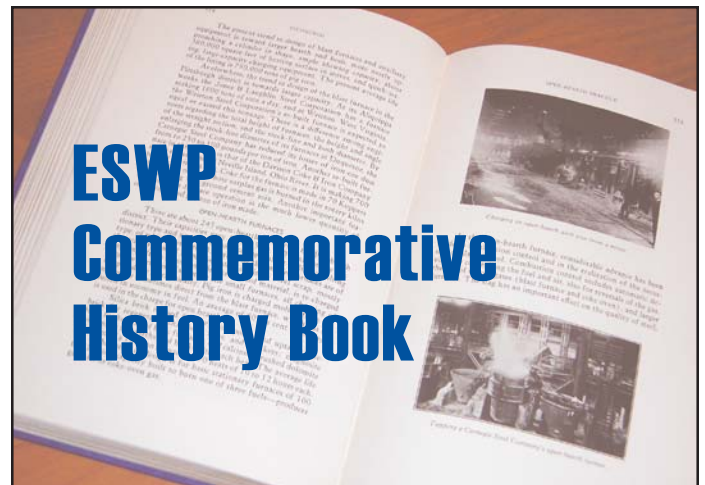
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