Last week, The Whistle asked incoming President Dr. G.P. “Bud” Peterson some questions about his thoughts and expectations for Georgia Tech and its students, faculty and staff. This week, we take a more personal tone with Tech’s 11th president.

You taught high school math and science early in your career. How did this ultimately lead you to a career in higher education? 

Val and I got married in college, we graduated and then moved to Kansas City, where I went to work for Black and Veatch Consulting Engineers working on the Safeguard anti-ballistic missile system project and Val worked as a swimming and diving instructor. Shortly after I started, President Nixon went to Russia and canceled the project I was working on. Then a group of engineers sitting around with security clearance for a project that had been terminated. I had a brief assignment, where I helped to develop a “new employee training program,” which not many companies had in the ’70s. I helped develop a six-week training program to teach engineers the “Black and Veatch method of engineering.” I really enjoyed it—it was like teaching at a university. New employees would come to classes a half-day, a couple of days a week for six weeks, which was kind of a new concept then.

I really enjoyed the teaching aspect and as a result, decided to go back and work on a Ph.D. so I could teach. Val and I both quit our jobs and moved back to Manhattan, Kansas, to go to graduate school. Much to our surprise, soon after we moved, we found out that Val was pregnant with our oldest son. Because we had changed jobs and insurance carriers, we had no insurance to cover the pregnancy, and at that time pregnancy was considered a “pre-existing condition.”

There was a small high school nearby that needed somebody to teach math and science, so I became the math and science department, while I worked on my master’s degree part time. I also coached football, basketball and track—and I was the co-sponsor of the yearbook. Val stayed home with our son and taught aerobics, delivered eggs from our chickens and worked part time as a substitute teacher.

A conversation with ... 

G.P. ‘Bud’ Peterson speaks about his family and background

Incoming President G.P. ‘Bud’ Peterson and Val Peterson met with students, faculty and staff during their campus visit.

The Whistle
Research

A healthy partnership
Tech, Georgia State University co-host NIH regional seminar

Researchers and administrators attending the National Institutes of Health (NIH) Regional Seminar in Atlanta will gain insight into the application and review process, according to the Office of Sponsored Programs (OSP).

Georgia Tech and Georgia State University have partnered to co-host the seminar on NIH program funding and grants administration April 16 and 17 at the Hyatt Regency.

The NIH holds two regional seminars a year, one East-coast based, and the other on the West coast. “We were asked to co-host this year’s eastern conference along with Georgia State University,” said OSP E-Commerce Officer Michele Powell. Registration is $350 per person. The eRA (Electronic Research Administration) Commons workshop costs $100 per person. An additional class has been added on April 14 from 1 to 4:30 p.m.

“We [Tech] have seen significant [NIH] funding in the last few years, largely because of our biomedical complex,” Powell said.

Adding that NIH and Department of Human Services funding together equals about $21.6 million, or 5 percent of the research awards that Tech receives.

The seminar contains three program tracks, OSP Training Program Manager Garrett Steed says.

The first, for principal investigators, examines how the NIH views and evaluates applications. The second track focuses on providing information to administrators.

The third track considers “All Interests,” offering question and answer sessions with NIH faculty, explores hot topics and current events, and presents a workshop on the institute’s eRA Commons information technology support.

This seminar is great for new investigators,” Steed said. “The Peer Review and Q&A enables principal investigators to ask NIH faculty direct questions.

“Given the current [economic] situation, it’s more important than ever to write successful proposals. The NIH Regional Seminar is one of the few programs I know that allows people to see both sides of the submission and review process.”

Steed says the NIH has developed new curriculum for the conference, in keeping current with the issues.

NIH has added sessions to answer questions about the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) and new classes that inform administrators and investigators of the latest administrative and policy changes dealing with financial conflicts of interest in research. "At this point, we are almost sold out," he said. “Interest has really picked up with the ARRA announcement.”

For more information
www.osp.gatech.edu/NIH_Seminar.html

Networking

Tech center to form 100G fiber-optic consortium

Ten companies have joined forces with the Institute to establish the Georgia Tech 100G Optical Networking Consortium, which is believed to be the first academic-industrial consortium of its kind.

To date, more than $2 million in support has been designated for this facility by the consortium’s founding research members: ADVA Optical Networking, Ciena, OFS, and Verizon—and by supporting members Avanex, IBM, Narda Microwave East, Nistica, Picometrix and RfSoft Design Group.

The consortium and facility allow academic and industry personnel to perform multidisciplinary research in all aspects of 100-gigabit-per-second transmission, supported by the diverse and complementary strengths of the industrial partners and faculty members.

Research topics range from fundamental studies of 100G optical transmission to assessment of optical and electronic technologies that will be used in such high-speed optical networks.

A variety of network architectures will be studied, including realistic impairments found in regional and ultra-long-haul links. These efforts also actively support the upcoming IEEE 100G standard for short-reach, client-side transmission in the local area network and future IEEE standards for short-reach transmission over laser-optimized, multi-mode fiber in data centers.

Historically, networking infrastructure has migrated to systems with increased transmission capacity, thereby allowing increased efficiency and the delivery of content-rich services, noted Stephen E. Ralph, the consortium’s director and a professor in the School of Electrical and Computer Engineering (ECE). Critical to the success of these new technologies is the ability to deploy them over existing fiber infrastructure, which is equivalent to increasing the capacity of a highway ten-fold without changing the roadway, he said.

ECG Professor Stephen E. Ralph (foreground) is the co-director of the 100G Optical Networking Consortium. His research group includes Andrew Stark, Cheng Lin, Yu-Ting Hsieh, Ben Clarke, and Patrick Decker.

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Institute

Plan of succession

Institute tree-replacement plan eases removal of older specimens

Robert Nesmith

Communications & Marketing

While the unfortunate decision must occasionally be made to remove some of the trees around campus, Georgia Tech’s landscaping policies are committed to preserving and increasing both the campus canopy and presence of trees.

In the next few weeks, a large, 100-year-old tree on the southeastern corner of the Tech Tower will be taken down. According to Facilities Landscape Manager Hyacinth Ide, removal is required for safety reasons.

“It has been in slow decline for a long time,” he said. “We’re concerned about pedestrians (and falling branches), and if it falls, it will hit the building.”

The evaluation showed the tree from the arborist recommended removing the oak because it is in a very high use area and is in poor health. The defects found in the tree pose an unacceptable risk of failure.

An arborist’s report has strongly advised the Institute remove the tree, said Anne Boykin-Smith, a master planner with Capital Planning and Space Management. “It’s a very large, significant tree, next to our oldest building,” she said. The tree is a 44-inch caliper white oak (meaning the diameter of the trunk is 44 inches at roughly four-and-a-half feet above the ground).

A few weeks ago, a 50-inch caliper white oak was taken down in the president’s glade. The inside of the tree had rotted, leaving a 3-foot diameter space in the middle of the trunk. According to Ide, damaged specimens like this don’t stand up to rough weather very well. Old age and the years of drought have taken their toll on some of the older trees.

But in light of tree removal around campus, whether due to old age, disease or new construction, campus planners replace the “amount” of trees taken down. For example, Ide says a 44-inch caliper tree cannot be planted in this white oak’s place, but 11 4-inch caliper trees planted on other areas of the campus are one possibility for replacement.

But to have the best results, Boykin-Smith said, trees must be planted during the right time of the season. “We are reaching the end of the optimal planting season,” Boykin-Smith said. Winter is the optimal season, she said, because the trees are dormant and we have an increase in rainfall.

“As part of being a member of Tree Campus USA, we have a ‘tree bank’, where we can bank the resources needed to purchase and plant trees at the optimal time,” Ide said. In the spot where the tree is now located, shade plants will be placed, including some sun-loving plants and some red bud trees.

Objectives of the Institute’s Landscape Master Plan include replacing the canopy of existing trees that are lost while increasing the coverage to a minimum of 55 percent of the campus.

Replacement trees can be plant- ed anywhere on campus and are recorded in the Institute’s tree inventory.

“Tech has nearly 6,000 trees on campus, and Landscape Services has been very proactive in monitoring trees for old age and disease.” According to Ide, “six trees are on the Facilities’ ‘watch list.’”

Capital Planning and Space Management is currently in the process of updating the Campus Tree Inventory database, which will include all trees planted within the last four years.

For more information

www.space.gatech.edu/LMP/

www.facilities.gatech.edu/
tree_campus_uca.pdf

Tech to turn it off for Earth Hour initiative

On Saturday, the Institute has committed to join more than 1,700 cities and towns, 5,000 organizations and 18,000 business in 80 countries to save energy. Started by the World Wildlife Fund in 2007, the initiative seeks participants from across the globe to turn off their lights and other electrical appliances on March 28 from 8:30 to 9:30 p.m.

After participating in the event last year, Tech was solicited to become a Flagship campus, according to Wertheimer. By signing on, the Institute has agreed to “turn out, take action.”

“We see ourselves as a leader in sustainability, and this is an opportunity for us to be at the forefront and inspire other institutions to join the cause,” said Howard Wertheimer, director of Capital Planning and Space Management.

“Faculty and staff members can turn off their office lights, shut down their computers and unplug their microwaves and clock radios that Friday as they leave for the weekend,” he said.

The Georgia Tech Freshman Council, partnering with the Atlanta Mayor’s Office and City Council, will hold an Earth Hour party at the Campanile from 8 to 10 p.m. Atlanta District 2 Commissioner Kwanza Hall is scheduled to attend the event.

“It’s exciting for me, as Tech’s city councilman, to rally students in particular around Earth Hour,” Hall said. “We’re planning low-tech fun for the Campanile—the kind that leaves a small carbon footprint while generating long-lasting memories.”

For more information

www.earthhour.org
I have been able to take advantage of the enormous amount of time on the Web, read as much as I could about Georgia Tech and also Tech’s seventh president, from engineering and also Tech’s seventh president, from 1969–71) say something to the effect that ‘Far too often leaders get hung up trying to guarantee that they’re making the right decision. They try to use some statistical method to gather all available information, or they try to put it through a series of committees.’

While it’s important to build support, at some point you have to decide. I’ve seen situations where no decision was a far worse course of action than any of the other options on the table.

I also try to lead by example. I think people observe individuals in positions of authority to see how they respond to various situations, in particular how they behave towards situations. Those responses and the way they respond to those situations can be contagious, both good and bad.

Finally, I try to manage “by walking around.” I have often thought that to be successful in these types of jobs, you really need a full-time position to support them. And every one of our children. Actually they are not children anymore, but rather young, successful and remarkably well-adjusted adults. And I am especially proud of my wife. I wouldn’t be where I am today without her support, guidance and inspiration and without the support of my family.

In May, you and Val have been married for 35 years. How do you and she complement one another personally and professionally? We got married in college, before my senior year. Prior to that I lived in the athletic dorm—bed check, meals in the dorm and all that. When Val and I got married, we moved out into our first apartment. It was my first time living on my own, so on to speak, but it was really living with Val. So we have been together for a long time and really we grew up together. Amazing, at 21 you think you are grown up, but there is so much to learn about life and about each other.

In many ways, we’re very different. I’m an engineer, very structured, process oriented and analytical. She describes herself as a ‘liberal artist.’ She’s very engaged and very social. Our children joke with her and say she could “talk to rocks.” She’ll strike up a conversation with a complete stranger. In addition, she’s a linguist, with a master’s degree in Spanish. She loves languages, almost as much as she loves people.

She has read every paper—conference paper, journal article, book or chapter that I have ever written. She proofreads them and marks them up. Today, if I write a column or an op-ed, I will ask her to look it over.

So in many ways, we’re very different, but fundamentally, in what we value, what we believe and how we feel about the world and what is important to us, we are very much alike.

Having been married for 35 years, we understand a lot about each other and we think. We may not always agree on issues. In fact, politically, we have pretty different views, but we don’t argue about them either. She’s a great extra set of eyes and ears. Val’s been very engaged at [Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute] and here at CU, and I’m sure she will be very engaged at Tech. We have a very busy schedule, and while she works incredibly hard—she kind of makes me feel like a slouch, she helps me keep the balance. I was very lucky that I went bowling one night in 1971!