Lamar Alumnus, Panama Canal CEO

As civil engineering projects go, the $5.25 billion expansion of the Panama Canal is far from the largest underway today, but, in terms of impact, the world is taking note. Completion of the project will result in changes in shipping world-wide, creating new opportunities for ports in the U.S. and elsewhere that are preparing to handle the larger post-Panamax class of ships that will be able to use the new locks.

Lamar University alumnus and CEO of the Panama Canal Authority, Jorge Quijano BSIE '73, MEIE '74, is at the helm of the expansion program.

Choosing Lamar was partly a question of finances, Quijano said. "My father wanted to send me to the States and said, ‘This is your budget.’" So, I had to look for a college supported by the state," he said. He applied to and was accepted by Texas Tech, UT-Arlington and UT-El Paso, but it was the curriculum that attracted him to Lamar.

He first considered majoring in electrical engineering, but several of his cousins who were civil engineers thought opportunities would be better for him in Panama if he earned an industrial engineering degree. "Industrial engineering requires learning a lot about all the other disciplines," Quijano said. "At Lamar, we had great hands-on teachers that came out of industry. And I had the opportunity to work a little bit in the industry that helped me put all the things together, the academics with the actual work in the field." Quijano worked part time for Rucker-Shaffer on blowout preventers in a student assistant job his department chair helped arrange.

Completion of the canal expansion has huge implications for Panama’s 3.5 million people, but the transit of cargo is only part of the picture. Panama’s ports on both sides of the country are expanding operations as part of continued growth of the country’s logistics centers, or "Hub of the Americas as we want to call it," Quijano said. Increasingly, Panama’s ports are used for distribution of cargo from Asia throughout North and South America.

The challenges are tremendous, but the rewards make the effort worthwhile. "I have enjoyed every minute, if not second, of it," Quijano said of his nearly four decades with the Panama Canal. When the new super cargo ships begin to transit the Isthmus of Panama in 2015, the nation will ensure its place as a leading player in international commerce with the capacity to change the very way we do business around the world for decades to come.

Larry and Cynthia Norwood Chemical Engineering Scholarship established

Lamar University has announced the creation of the Larry and Cynthia Norwood Chemical Engineering Scholarship in recognition of a generous gift to the Lamar University Foundation from the Austin couple. The $1 million endowment will provide funds for both undergraduate scholarships and graduate fellowships for students pursuing bachelor’s, master’s and doctoral degrees in chemical engineering.

Larry Norwood graduated from LU in 1973 with a bachelor’s degree in chemical engineering. His wife, Cynthia (Smesny) Norwood, graduated in 1972 with a bachelor’s degree in history. Larry Norwood spent his entire career with Lubrizol Corp. He began working for the company as a student through Lamar’s cooperative education program. After graduation, he went to work for Lubrizol full time and steadily moved up through positions of increased responsibility. He retired last year as corporate vice president of operations, but continues to work as a consultant for the company, particularly in ongoing projects in China.

Larry and Cynthia Norwood said they appreciate the great education they received at Lamar. “It enabled us to have a really good, challenging career,” he said. “We’re hoping with this gift to help some other students get a good education in engineering, get a degree and have a chance to have a successful career like we did.”
The College of Engineering 16th annual Softball Tournament

This year’s softball tournament was organized by Institute of Electrical & Electronic Engineers (IEEE) student chapter. The event was held Saturday, November 16 at the Beaumont Athletic Complex. Each of the five engineering departments played in the tournament along with a team of alumni. This year, the alumni took home the championship and the Electrical Engineering team was the Runner-up.

Student Spotlights

Mechanical Engineering
Mini-Baja Team

A group of 10 LU senior mechanical engineering students, also known as “Cardinal Racing,” who designed, built and raced an all-terrain vehicle took first place in a sled-pull event, and finished 30th overall out of the 100 teams at the 2013 SAE Baja East competition in Cookeville, Tenn., April 18-21.

Civil Engineering Students
Row Concrete Canoe

For the first time since 2006, Lamar ASCE was able to build and take a concrete canoe to competition. While at the competition several members presented technical papers in front of a panel of judges and did very well. This being the first concrete canoe built by this years team members of ASCE, they are looking forward to next year's competition to represent Lamar University.

EE Students Earn National Recognition

Nine senior and two junior electrical engineering majors at Lamar University received top honors in a recent competition in Denver, sponsored by IEEE (Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers), the world’s largest professional association for the advancement of technology. Of the four competitions Lamar’s students entered, they won first place in two, and second place in another.

Farewell Dr. Hopper & Welcome Dr. Vic Zaloom

Dr. Jack Hopper, Dean of the College of Engineering for the past 14 years, is now serving as Dean Emeritus and Chemical Engineering Freshman advisor. Shortly before his departure from the Dean’s office, Lamar University announced the appointment of Dr. Vic Zaloom as Interim dean, effective September 1, 2013. Zaloom has been with Lamar University where he started as Professor and Chair in 1981.

He is a fellow of the Institute of Industrial Engineers (IIE) and the author of more than 80 publications and paper presentations. Zaloom has received numerous awards throughout the years, including being the first Ph.D. graduate of the Industrial and Systems Department at the University of Houston and being named a Distinguished Alumnus of that department.

Zaloom most recently served as Interim Dean of the Graduate School and Associate Dean of Engineering. He holds a bachelor’s and master's degree in industrial engineering from the University of Florida, and a Ph.D. in industrial and systems engineering with an emphasis in systems engineering and mathematics from the University of Houston.
Cardinal Applause

Congratulations Dr. John Guo, an associate professor in the department of Chemical Engineering, and Dr. Suying Wei, an assistant professor in the Department of Chemistry & Biochemistry, have been notified that their project, “The First Steps Toward Giant Magnetoresistive Carbon Nanocomposites,” has been funded by the National Science Foundation as part of its Early-Concept Grants for Exploratory Research (EAGER) program.

Congratulations to Dr. Helen Lou, a professor in the Department of Chemical Engineering, who has been selected by Shanxi Province of China as one of the “Top 100 Talents” for the province’s economic growth. As part of this award program to forge international collaboration and stimulate economic growth, Dr. Lou will receive one million RMBs (Chinese Yuan) over three years to develop clean coal related technologies in collaboration with researchers at Shanxi University.

Three Industrial engineering students presented at the S-STEM 2013 Undergraduate research conference, held in Beaumont, TX. Students Carolina Salas Espinosa, Pedro J Hidalgo Herrera, Jason A Holbrook presented “Developing Effective Taxonomies for Near Miss Reporting.” The research explored how Near miss records can provide valuable information for improving safety. Manual categorization can be tedious, time consuming and error prone. This project explores the categorization of more than 40,000 safety records. Error rates of up to 25% were observed when fitting records into event type categories. The initial results identified the limitation of the lack of rigid taxonomies for near miss classification. For reporting, a decision maker expects events to be grouped into neat unique categories so that they can present summary statistics. However, a significant percentage of the record set fit into multiple event type categories. Ongoing work explores the potential of using natural language processing to identify errors.

Society of Plastics Engineers Thermoplastic Materials & Foams Division Scholarships was awarded to Ms. Xi Zhang and Mr. Qingliang He, Ph.D. students in Chemical Engineering, at the Polyolefins 2013 International Conference in Houston in February. There were more than 600 attendees, to include 50+ college students from throughout Texas. Only 6 scholarships were awarded, the others going to students from TAMU, Texas Tech, North Texas, and Texas State. The major professor of Zhang and He is Dr. John Guo, an assistant professor in the Dan F. Smith Department of Chemical Engineering.

Qiang Xu has been selected as Lamar University’s 2013 University Scholar. Xu’s research is in the areas of large-scale dynamic simulation and optimization, production scheduling and planning, multi-scale systems integration, soft-sensor technique development, and industrial pollution. He has published more than 63 peer-reviewed research papers, and has served as principal or co-principal investigator on funded projects totaling in excess of $1 million. These include funding from the National Science Foundation, the U.S. Department of Defense, and leading petrochemical companies.

The 2013 recipient of the Bess Gentry Award is Candace Montgomery, Huffman senior. Montgomery is an Industrial engineering student moving on to pursue an MBA this fall. The Bess Gentry Award was established in 1985 to honor Gentry, the first dean of women at Lamar State College of Technology, and to recognize notable senior women based on leadership, character, service to the university and community, and above average scholarship.

Congratulations to Lawrence Farr, a 1966 LU Electrical Engineering alumnus and principal engineer at Eaton Corp., who received the Elihu Thomson Electrotechnology Medal. This prestigious honor is given to an individual who has contributed in an exceptional, dedicated way to the field of electrotechnology standardization, conformity assessment, and related activities.

Congratulations Alberto Marquez, associate professor in the Department of Industrial Engineering, received the University Merit Award for 2013.

Thank you BASF TOTAL petrochemicals for sponsoring the College of Engineering Scholarship Breakfast and STEM Seminar. Your contributions are greatly appreciated!

Helen Lou honored as 2013 University Professor

Lamar University honored Helen Lou, a professor in the Dan F. Smith Department of Chemical Engineering, as the 2013 University Professor, with officials applauding her as one of the world’s most productive environmental researchers and an outstanding faculty member who has contributed significantly to the successes of her department. The professorship, awarded for life, is the most prestigious faculty award conferred by Lamar’s academic community.

“The award is the pinnacle of academic achievement at our university and is recognized by all as an emblem of highest merit,” said Stephen Doblin, provost and vice president for academic affairs. “Recipients are selected by their colleagues and are chosen for their academic stature and achievements, honored in the demanding and competitive culture of higher education.” In addition, Lou will become the second Ann Die-Hasselmo Scholar, made possible by the creation and funding of the Lamar University Faculty Excellence Endowment by Ann Die Hasselmo, a 1966 graduate of LU. Honored as Lamar’s 1986 Regents’ Professor, Hasselmo was a longtime faculty member whose career path later took her to top university administrative positions and other roles devoted to strengthening academic leadership.

During her Lamar career, Lou has taught six undergraduate courses and four graduate courses. For nine of the past 10 semesters, her student evaluation scores have exceeded 4.5 on a 5-point scale. She has served on dozens of graduate committees and has directed four doctoral dissertations and 12 master’s theses. She has received four funded projects totaling $75,000 to enhance instruction, including two from the National Science Foundation and one from the National Collegiate Inventors and Innovators Alliance. She serves as faculty advisor for Lamar’s chapter of the American Institute of Chemical Engineers and as a mentor to undergraduate chemical engineering majors. Her early accomplishments led to a Lamar University Merit Award for teaching excellence in 2004.

“Dr. Lou’s record of professional activity is, frankly, amazing,” Doblin said. Lou is a member of the American Institute of Chemical Engineers, American Chemical Society, American Electroplaters and Surface Finishers Society, Sigma Xi scientific research society and Tau Beta Pi engineering honor society. She is a Registered Professional Engineer in Texas. Lou has served as chair, vice chair, board member or committee member of many professional organizations, and she has chaired dozens of sessions at professional conferences and meetings around the world.
Perez builds bright future at Panama Canal

Since Andrea Llamas Perez was a little girl, she has enjoyed the idea of a challenge. “My dad, an architect, used to bring me to the construction sites he worked on,” Perez said. “I loved seeing how every day created new tasks and obstacles. One of the things I like about civil engineering is that there is always a challenge. I like the feeling of not having a routine.”

A native of Celaya, Guanajuato, Mexico, Perez moved to the United States to attend Lamar, which she discovered when her aunt notified her of Lamar’s highly ranked engineering school.

“When I started Lamar, I knew I wanted to have a deeper understanding of engineering,” Perez said. “My first year at Lamar, I sought construction management, but then decided I wanted to do civil engineering instead.” Perez, who graduated in the spring of 2013, is pursuing a master of engineering with a concentration in civil engineering after receiving a scholarship from the chair of her department.

“For three months, Perez worked in the construction management unit with a group of top engineers. “I learned how to work in teams since the jobs we had to complete in the internship were based on teamwork,” Perez said. “I got so close to the team while I was there, they were like family.”

Perez feels that her experiences with Lamar’s civil engineering department have truly prepared her for a successful career.

“After graduating, I debated on whether I should return to Mexico, where my family is, or stay in the United States,” Perez said. “However, the chair of civil engineering offered me a scholarship to return for my master’s degree which persuaded me to further my education at Lamar.”

This summer, Perez had the opportunity to participate in an internship at the Panama Canal expansion project, otherwise known as the Third Set of Locks Project.

Perez first learned about this opportunity in an email saying that Jorge Quijano, CEO from the Panama Canal, was coming to Lamar to give a presentation about the Panama Canal expansion.

“Right now, I want to prepare myself and succeed in the projects that I encounter,” Perez said. “I wish to do another master’s, and then apply to construction companies abroad. After that, I want to work for my parents’ consultant company in Mexico.”

Attending Lamar has provided Perez immeasurable opportunities and helped her grow as an individual.

“Before coming to Lamar, I didn’t realize my potential,” Perez said. “Now, I am more independent and am ready to take on challenges. Through my networking at Lamar, I have received valuable experiences that have made me more outgoing professionally. Lamar believes in my accomplishments, and instilled confidence within me.”
NSF Fellowship

Anita Hongbo Gu, a joint Lamar University/Harbin Institute of Technology (HIT) Ph.D. student in chemical engineering, has earned the prestigious Student Participation Fellowship from the National Science Foundation. Gu will represent Lamar and HIT at an upcoming Research and Innovation Conference in Boston, Mass. Gu is a visiting scholar working with Lamar chemical engineering faculty and student researchers with the support of the China Council Scholarship (CCS) program.

Honeywell taps Ph.D. student winner of design challenge

A Lamar University research assistant studying how dynamic simulation can create safer and more-reliable chemical plant operations is the winner of Honeywell's annual student competition in the Americas. M.A. Kader Rasel, a chemical engineering Ph.D. student in Lamar University's College of Engineering, was announced the winner of the UniSim Design Challenge before attendees at the 2013 Honeywell Users Group (HUG) Americas conference in Phoenix this week.

LU Engineering Ranked at #11

Lamar University has been named a top school nationally for return on investment by PayScale Inc., creator of the largest database of individual compensation profiles in the world. Lamar was ranked 11th overall for return on investment for engineering majors, just behind Massachusetts Institute of Technology. LU was the only Texas school on the list.

"Engineering is an outstanding career field, and I believe Lamar is an excellent choice for bachelor's, master's and doctoral level degrees in engineering," said Jack Hopper, Dean Emeritus of the College of Engineering. "The investments our students make, in terms of time, effort and finances, pay off in rewarding careers."

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