

## WHERE ARE THEY NOW? CATCHING UP WITH EMERGING LEADERS PROGRAM GRADUATES



This month we profile Brad Austin, PE CSP a graduate of the Emerging Leaders Program of 2009. Brad grew up in Derby, Kansas. He graduated from Oklahoma State University with a Bachelor's of Science Degree in Fire Protection and Safety Engineering Technology. He is a Fire Protection Engineer and has been at Poole Fire Protection Inc. for ten years. He lives in Gardner, Kansas with his wife of three years Becca, daughter of six weeks Callie, and dog of eight years Zeke.

### ELP (Class of 2009)

*What are some memories of your ELP class and what did you like the best?*

I was in the ELP class of 2009, and I remember being amazed at how many other companies deal with the same issues that our company was dealing with, even though none of them were in fire protection. I was the youngest person in my class and was naïve to some of those sorts of things at the time. I really enjoyed the opportunities to network and get to know other engineers during the evening activities, as well as the fantastic food (of course). It really helped me to become more comfortable talking with other engineers and understanding that we all deal with the same issues in one way or another.

*Speakers that influenced you?*

I was and am still incredibly impressed with Scott Heidner's ability to make everyone feel welcome and included, as well as his superhuman ability to memorize the names, companies, type of work, and locations of every member of every class before even meeting them (and now he does it for programs in multiple states). I also remember being impressed with Derek Schmidt's presentation abilities and the presence that he projected. I believe I took little nuggets from all of the speakers in one way or another. Picking up bits and pieces from managing young engineers, to leading within your organization, to being introduced to QBS, to understanding contract language and financial implications of various aspects of business, to ... the list goes on.

*What did you take away from the ELP sessions that you didn't expect?*

I never expected to gain a greater understanding and appreciation for the impact and importance of political participation with regard to business and the engineering profession.

*Do you think the ELP sessions helped you advance as a professional engineer?*

My participation in the ELP has absolutely helped me advance as a professional engineer. I feel that any opportunity you take to grow in the various fields of discussion covered in the ELP contributes to your overall growth as a person and a professional. Being better suited to lead others, guide younger engineers, and understand the impacts of external factors such as legislation on the engineering community are all key elements to being a great professional engineer and leader within the industry.

*What got you involved as the ACEC Board member?*

I was privileged enough to be asked to join the ACEC of Kansas Board of Directors early in 2015. At that time I had participated in ELP, ELET, and was actively participating in and serving as the chairman of the AIA/ACEC/OFPM/OSFM Partnering Committee. My involvement in these various aspects of ACEC had gone a long way in peaking my interest in continuing to grow my involvement in the organization. I have gained a lot from the opportunities I've been

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presented with thus far through ACEC, and I wanted to give back to the organization and to serve the rest of the membership. My understanding is that I was invited to join the Board for a number of reasons, but not the least of which was to help diversify the Board into the various sectors of engineers that our organization represents. Being a fire protection engineer, I mostly work in the vertical side of engineering. The Board at the time recognized the need to continue to promote both the horizontal and vertical aspects of the engineering community, and thought that I would be a good add to the group. I am truly honored to have been asked to join the team and to represent all of the engineering companies within the membership of our organization.

*What is something that you've learned since being on the Board?*

Being on the Board has helped me to continue to open my eyes to all of the things that impact our industry, as well as to become more aware of all the things that the ACEC leadership does "behind the scenes" that impact our business lives on a daily basis. I was one of those people who said, "ACEC is all about KDOT and road construction." I was wrong. While our current focus has been greatly directed towards the preservation of T-Works funding, I assure you that the Board has also held many conversations regarding how to continue to actively serve all sectors of the engineering community and to ensure that we do not get too narrowly focused on KDOT while forgetting to serve our other constituents.

As a first year vice president with the ACEC Kansas chapter, I had the opportunity to attend a national orientation of various state chapter leaders from across the country, held at the ACEC National office in Washington, D.C. During that event I was amazed to hear from all the various groups around the country regarding how they deal with a lot of the same, as well as many different, challenges that we face. I've come to appreciate the engineering community as a whole on a greater level.

*Are you involved in any community organizations (charities, church, etc.)?*

I have to admit that my work life balance has not always been the greatest. I am still a volunteer firefighter/EMT with the Derby Fire and Rescue Department, but only get back there about once a month. I also serve on the Planning Commission of Gardner, KS. Outside of that, my life currently revolves around raising my new little girl and figuring out how to survive on my new sleep schedule that came with her birth. :)

## **GENERAL**

*What are your hobbies?*

I enjoy a lot of different things. I enjoy spending time at Table Rock Lake fishing, boating, and just enjoying nature. I enjoy home improvement projects. I enjoy anything fire or firefighting related. I enjoy golf, but probably haven't played in over a year (probably two). I enjoy shooting, but haven't done that in over a year either.

*What advice would you give a young engineer or what do you wish you would have learned in school that you learned on the job?*

For those engineering students still in school, I would tell them that it is incredibly important to learn how to learn, as well as to learn where to find answers. You will not have all the answers, ever, but if you know where to look and how to grow, you will be set up for success. I learned far more in my first four months on the job than I did in my four years of college.

As a young engineer, I would encourage them to keep an open mind, open eyes,

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and open ears. Learn from those around you and take in all the information you can. Don't be afraid to ask questions or to question things that you don't think are right, but be sure to do so respectfully. Always think towards the future and do your best.

*What is most rewarding about your job; what makes it all worthwhile?*

I truly love my job because it provides me with the opportunity to help people every day. The work that I do impacts the lives of uncounted people. It is sometimes hard to remember that what we do (not just fire protection engineers, although that is what I am focused on) saves lives, because if we do our job right, the life threatening situations are thwarted before they become a problem. In contrast to the firefighter who saves people in peril, we save people from being in peril.

*Tell us something about the fire protection business that most people don't know?*

We do more than just sprinklers. As a fire protection engineer, I am somehow involved in the planning, review, or inspection of everything within a building that has to do with fire protection or life safety. This includes things like fire resistance-rated construction and construction materials used in buildings, emergency lights, exit signs, paths of egress, travel distances, door hardware, the width of doors and stairs, the location and height of hand rails and guard rails, fire alarm and sprinkler systems, portable fire extinguishers, etc. It is a very wide variety of things that we deal with on a daily basis...which also keeps things interesting and challenging.

## MARK YOUR CALENDAR



**KDOT/ACEC Kansas Partnering Conference**  
**Monday, October 10, 2016**  
**Capitol Plaza Hotel-Maner Conference Center**  
**Topeka, KS**

## A WORD From KSPE

Mark your calendar for the 17th Annual Engineers' Foundation of Kansas Fundraiser Golf Tournament! The tournament will be held on Friday, September 30, 2016 with a Shotgun Start at 9:00 a.m. at Colbert Hills Golf Course in Manhattan.

The tournament benefits a great cause. Revenue from the event is used to support activities of the Engineers' Foundation of Kansas, including MATHCOUNTS competitions and grants to the three Kansas engineering colleges to be used for student and faculty development.

If you have any questions, please call the EFK office at 785.233.2121.

*For KSPE membership information, please visit [kansasengineer.org](http://kansasengineer.org) or contact KSPE*