

# Vollum awards go to scope and graphics leaders

## Rod: Keen sense of customer

The most valuable asset an engineer can have is a keen sense of the customer, says Rodney Bristol, a recipient of the 1988 Howard Vollum Award for Engineering Excellence.

Rod, who served as chief system architect for Portable Instrument Division's 2400 scope family, is known as an engineer with a keen "customer conscience."

Having been a customer himself for several years, Rod strongly believes that engineers must also be customer advocates. "We don't work for our company as much as we work for our customers," he says. "It's a classic trade-off, and the way to make it work is for engineers to have enough sense to know what's important to the people we make products for.

"Engineers too often expect managers to make the decision after which they have to either like it or lump it. But if engineers know enough to make those decisions, too, they can make a tremendous difference. Unfortunately, many engineers have an interesting job for a while, but not many customers."

Rod, who is currently PID engineering manager, was responsible for most of the system level design and integration of the 2400 Series, which revolutionized the portable scope market and is a top dollar producer for Tek today. He generated the interface specification for the majority of chips used in the design. He was also responsible for the definition of the user interface, which has been acclaimed as the industry standard for portable scopes.

He developed the 2400 Series on-screen voltage and time cursor, which caused competitors to redesign their products. And he designed the automated calibration facilities inherent in scopes.

"I can think of no one who better car-

ries on the ideals of Howard Vollum," says PID's Alfred Hillman. "Rod believes and acts as though people are the most important resource we have. He is constantly trying to help people grow to all they can be. He is always on the lookout for new ideas and techniques and technologies that might help us be better in meeting the needs of our customers.

Rod, whose favorite non-engineering pastime is boating with his wife and five children, has attended Columbia Christian College, Portland State University and the University of Portland. He holds several patents and has published four applications related articles during the past two years.

Rod says he was surprised at receiving the award but accepts it with great pride. "I personally identify with the values Howard Vollum expressed," he says. "And because of that, I take it as an outstanding personal honor."

He has been recognized for his technical strength as well his problem-solving capabilities. The PID marketing staff often asks him to meet with customers in sensitive situations.

"I would tell a new engineer that to succeed you first have to get in touch with your customers," he says, "and to operate with a strong sense of conviction about what we need to do.

"My greatest concern is that some engineers expect somebody else to exercise good judgement and somehow they'll get it all the wisdom they need by following instructions. But engineers only succeed if they develop their own convictions. The purpose of engineering is to use good judgment and make rational choices in a technical context."

## Jack: In tune with technology

The keys to making the grade in a high tech engineering career are staying in tune with technology, seizing opportunities, and facing challenges as if there are no boundaries, says Jack Sterett, a 1988 winner of the Howard Vollum Award for Engineering Excellence.

"It also helps to be in the right place at the right time," says Jack, a 28-year Tek veteran and computer graphics pioneer.

Jack began work in graphics in 1967 and is now engineering project manager for Graphic Workstations Division's new high end 3-D workstations and terminals. His IDG co-workers describe him as "clearly IDG's product innovator."

He has been project manager for several flagship IDG products, including the 4114 DVST terminal, 4113 Tek color raster terminal, 4115B high resolution 60 Hz non-interfaced color raster terminal (first in industry), and the 4125 color raster terminal.

He also managed the 4111, a major revenue generator, through its design completion. He was responsible for responding to the customer requirement for more segment memory on the 4125, a critical feature thought to be architecturally impossible to add.

"To solve problems and be an innovator, you have to stay in tune with technology, as difficult as that can be," says Jack. "The decisions you make must be based on what's current, and the risks you take must be based on how you perceive the future."

He calls his work with the 4115 and 4125 projects his most significant contributions. "And those were 'sweetheart projects,'" he says, "which resulted from being in the right place at the right time."

An electronics technician while serving

in the Air Force, Jack earned his bachelor's degree in engineering from Portland State University in 1971. He has completed work towards a master's degree at PSU and Oregon State. He has also benefited from Tek courses and management programs.

Outside of work, Jack becomes and "outdoor activist" when he has time.

Jack will use the research grant he gets as a Vollum award winner to either improve his technical and professional skills through courses at the Oregon Graduate Center, or spend time with customers to better understand their requirements. "I would like to learn more about how we can improve the company's capabilities," he says. "I might even spend some time in the field in Europe."

Jack's ability to champion a project and motivate his people have been recognized throughout the company. According to IDG's Sue Grady, "he creates strong, motivated and focused teams. The phrase 'it can't be done' is not in his vocabulary. He has an outstanding recruiting record and mentors new engineers into excellent engineers and outstanding leaders. He is known for his products and his people."

Not one to be intimidated by boundaries and barriers, Jack believes success comes from believing anything is possible.

"There are a lot of barriers that we put in place," he says. "We often feel confined to boundaries and it's those 'dos' and 'don'ts' that you have to get out of the way. And once you've done that, you work on getting people committed to your cause. It's important to wear out a lot of shoes getting around to talk to people."