Chief Engineer Linley Gumm:

Recalling the successes—and the flops

(The Chief Engineer:Scientist designation represents the highest level in Tek's six-step career path for engineers and scientists.)

Ninth in a Series

Meet Linley Gumm, an electrical engineer who always knew what he wanted to be, "He's as if I was given a mission in life. I would have been crushed if I couldn't have gotten into a school someplace to study electrical engineering, because I was totally uninterested in everything else I looked at.

Linley's interest in EE began around the sixth grade when he started playing with radios and other electrical devices.

"I grew up on a wheat ranch near Tohono, a small town in Eastern Washington near the Idaho border. The schools were great, but they didn't have much about radio, so I sent away for books and magazines on my own." 

He's also indebted to a local ham operator who helped him get a license.

After high school, Linley pursued his EE studies in residence at Washington State University, earning his B.S. degree in June, 1964. A week later, he married Celia, and they came to Beaverton after a two-week honeymoon to begin his 25-year career with Tek.

"My first job was evaluating the 423 portable oscilloscope in the old Bonset plant. At the same time others were moving on to the 453, the hottest product for all of Tektronix. Everything had to stand up for it to get done." 

In the ensuing years, Linley's career covered successes such as having a hand in development of the 454 and the 7K Series, as well as some disappointments including "a rather strange trigger technique that never came to anything."

Another disappointment was the 7L8 microwave amplifier project. One of the earliest Tek products to have a microprocessor in it.

"We started work on developing this product in 1974, and finally shipped our first instrument in 1976. As it looked back, it was a truly terrible microprocessor, and we were in trouble financially. I have no idea why they didn't have any of the tools that are available today."

Although the 7L8 never did sell well, Linley and his crew developed components and technologies that later were used in the 454.

"That's the reason because the Navy placed a massive order for the 452 at the beginning of the project cycle. Ordinarily, it takes six to nine months for orders to ramp up."

The Navy accepted our offer after they saw the first product. In 1978, that Larry Lockwood and his crew put together. We decided that it needed more performance than would have been in the commercial market, and it needed to be modularized for flexibility and manufacturability.

Then, the 452 was born. The challenge was to make the changes and get it out in 1978. It was a real team effort. No one could say it wasn't nice to see our career panning out quite nicely because we were able to make a really superb product."

In addition to helping develop outstanding FDI products, Linley is helping to bring talented engineers to Tek through his recruiting efforts at Washington State University and the University of Idaho. In a sense he acts as a broker between the schools and Tektronix. Tek has 85 of the universities, such as equipment grants and contacts for information, and the universities have students and technology.

"Although I represent Tek's interest in recruiting, I firmly believe that any worthwhile deal is a win-win situation. Winning at the expense of someone else, especially in the university setting, is very bad business."

One indication of Linley's success in recruiting is the two-year-old intern program in FDI, a program led like to see emphasized in other divisions.

"We need to work on getting to the students earlier. Other companies such as HP and IBM are attracting a significant number of students because of their intern programs."

As a recruiter, Linley tries to find the best candidates. At the same time, he urges hiring managers to take the time to hire someone who's really good.

"That's paid off. There are a lot of things I can't take credit for, but I believe I have managed to bring in a bunch of good people!"

Linley's also proud of his proposal to endow a chair in analog electronics at WSU, with half of the money to come from industry and matching funds from the Washington State Legislature.

"Everything I do is something we'd do. And that, of course is appropriate, since this is very much a 'we' business."

Away from Tek, Linley lends his expertise to the Oregon Commission on Public Broadcasting. As chairman of the Technical Advisory committee, he's helped develop a plan for public broadcasting in Oregon, as mandated by the 1985 Legislature.

"Working on this project took a lot longer than expected, but I certainly did get a good inside view of public decision-making"

What free time he has, Linley likes to spend with his family, his wife and daughters, Lisa, a senior at Aloha High School, and Deborah, a ninth grader at Five Oaks. They have never been high on Linley's list of likes, but he's been to China and Europe, as well as most of the U.S., mostly on Tek business. In China he represented FDI at a trade show in Beijing in November, 1984.

"That was hard work, mainly because I wasn't accustomed to talking to someone whose face is only three or four inches away. The Chinese people crowd very tightly together, and there was a constant jostling on the show floor. For me it was very tiring!"

Linley took a educational leave for nine months in 1965-66 to earn his Masters degree in electrical engineering at the University of Washington. The degree was awarded in 1970, and five years later Linley was licensed as a Professional Engineer. As a result he spent a number of years consulting outside of Tek, primarily with radio stations.

"This gave me a great opportunity to use our test equipment in the field, and to gain an insight into other people's businesses. I found I had a better understanding of Tek's business when I made comparisons. This has broadened my base considerably."

Linley confesses to having good work habits, a quality he developed as a boy working on the family wheat ranch. Every summer from the age of 13 until university graduation at 22, Linley worked all summer, including the harvest, sometimes as much as 84 hours a week.

"I'm the youngest of six; two sisters and three brothers. Two of my brothers are farming with my father, but I wasn't cut out for that kind of life. I suffer from hay fever, a miserable allergy for a wheat farmer."

As Chief Engineer, Linley views his role as a person who pulls together ideas and opportunities to see if they're worth chasing. He looks for new products, or he takes an old product and tries to fit it to a new market.

"It's like the business version of Let's Make a Deal. You try to get up win-win deals. You know what people needs are, and say, 'If I provide you with this, can you provide me with that?'""By the time you're done, you have a situation where everybody wins. That's what I keep my eyes open for, to benefit FDI and Tektronix."

"Of course, that's easier said than done. You don't win all the time, to say the least."

—Ken Cushman

Linley Gumm, Chief Engineer, always knew that he wanted to be an EE.

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Tek Heereveen has been awarded Class A+ MRP with a perfect score of 100. It is the second Dutch company and one of 200 or so companies in the world to attain this recognition. Roger Brooks of Roger Brooks & Associates (left) congratulates Jen Glieseke (Tek Holland N.V. GM) with the Class A+ MRP award.

LID’s Debra Seltzer and Sam Strang hold award from Electronic Design News, honoring Tek’s ad for new 11000-series scopes. Ad was called “most useful, informative and attractive” in EDN’s seminannual readership vote. It will appear in special section of May 14 issue.

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