

Remembering the Tech Guy and the Geek

Longtime SBCCI Director of Technical Services and *I-Codes* Champion Passes Away

By Trey Hughes

Richard A. Vognild, PE, CBO, longtime Director of Technical Services for the legacy group Southern Building Code Congress International (SBCCI) who played a pivotal role in the development of the first comprehensive set of *International Codes*, passed away Aug. 9. He was 80.

Friends and former coworkers remember Vognild for his accomplishments in the engineering and code development professions as well as his distinct personality with a calm and steady demeanor and a keen sense of humor.

"This is the passing of an icon," said ICC Senior Vice President of Technical Services Tom Frost. "For many years, Rick was a stabilizing force in the code development community."

"Rick was an incredibly diverse individual who was a resource for all of us," explained Paul Heilstedt, former CEO of the legacy group Building Officials and Code

Administrators International. "And I will always remember his dry sense of humor. Probably very few people knew that about him because he always said it with a straight face and in a solemn manner."

The Tech Guy

During the strenuous process of consolidating the legacy codes into the *I-Codes*, Vognild served as secretary to the International Building Code Coordinating Committee and as a member of the Codes Scoping Committee. He also served as the liaison between the technical staffs of the legacy organizations and the International Code Council Board of Directors.

"Rick Vognild played a critical role in laying the foundation that ICC stands on today," said Code Council CEO Dominic Sims. "And I can think of no one who was better equipped to withstand and ultimately conquer the challenge. He was a unique, multi-talented individual

whose work will have a lasting impact on our association and the industry we serve."

"It was an overwhelming task," Heilstedt said of the consolidation of the *I-Codes*. "Rick had knack for taking any critical situation and turning it into some incredible solution. He had a lot of technical skill and knowledge and could analyze any complex code situation."

"Rick was a tech guy, for sure," said ICC Vice President of Architectural and Engineering Services John Battles, who joined Vognild's Technical Services staff at SBCCI in 1985. "He knew the codes and he knew how the codes worked together. He was so detailed, methodical and thorough in everything he did, when he finished something it couldn't have been done any better."

In 1999, Heilstedt, John Traw, CEO of the legacy group International Conference of Building Officials (ICBO), and the late William J. Tangye, former ICC and



Richard Vognild, 1983

SBCCI CEO, presented Vognild the first-ever copy of the 2000 *International Building Code* in honor of his role in the development of the *I-Codes*. At the same Joint Annual Conference in St. Louis, SBCCI Board of Directors President Larry Bell presented Vognild the J. W. "Bill" Neese President's Award to recognize his significant contributions to the legacy organization. He retired from SBCCI that year after more than 16 years of service.

Bell said Vognild's leadership was a guiding force during the consolidation of the legacy codes into the *I-Codes*. "It required a person with steady hands, a willingness to listen to all points of view, an ability to recognize the value in all of the model building codes, the ability to remove his 'Southern hat,' and, perhaps most of all, a calm attitude," Bell said while presenting the Neese award. "The entire code enforcement and construction communities owe this man a debt of gratitude."

In 2006, Vognild was the recipient of the prestigious Bobby J. Fowler Award, the highest honor given by the Code Council that is presented to an individual whose contributions have advanced ICC's goals in achieving a safer built environment. Unable to attend that year's Annual Conference in Orlando, Fla., Vognild provided a written statement that was read by fellow Fowler

honorees Heilstedt and Dallas architect Jim Sealy, who accepted the award on behalf of their longtime friend.

"When a person receives an award like this it is customary to thank those who made it possible," wrote Vognild. "Since that includes hundreds of thousands of individuals from code enforcement, design professions and allied industries who attended meeting, after meeting, after meeting, individual recognition is impossible, so I thank them collectively."

Vognild, a licensed P.E., structural engineer and Certified Building Official, was a nationally recognized expert on high-wind events, concrete design and construction, earthquake mitigation, fire prevention and accessibility.

Vognild joined SBCCI's Education Department in 1983 where his responsibilities included planning and conducting classes and seminars on code content and administration. One year later, Vognild was named manager of SBCCI's newly formed Code Development Services department, where he and staff were responsible for the development of the Standard Codes and he served as technical secretary for code revision committees. During this time, Vognild also was the SBCCI staff representative to the CABO Board for the Coordination of Model Codes, the CABO Model Energy Code Committee, and the CABO One and Two Family Dwelling



Former ICBO CEO John Traw (left), former ICC and SBCCI CEO William J. Tangye (second from right), and former BOCA CEO Paul Heilstedt (far right) presented Vognild the first-ever copy of the 2000 *International Building Code*.

Code Committee.

Vognild was the secretary for the development of SBCCI's *Deemed-to-Comply Standard for Single and Multifamily Dwellings in High Wind Regions* and was a contributor to the development of FEMA 55 Coastal Construction Manual and FEMA 320 Taking Shelter from the Storm. As an employee of the Portland Cement Association he contributed to the development of the National Research Council's *The Design and Construction of Residential Slabs-on-Ground: State of the Art* and was a member of ACI International's Structural Concrete Committee 318.

Vognild represented SBCCI in the Central United States Earthquake Consortium and was a contributor to



the development of FEMA 232 Guide to Seismic Resistant Construction and FEMA 356 Seismic Rehabilitation of Buildings. He was a member of the Underwriters Laboratory Fire Council and the SBCCI staff representative on committees for the National Fire Protection Association, American Society of Civil Engineers and ASTM International. He also served on the ADAAG Review Federal Advisory Committee.

Prior to joining SBCCI, Vognild was a regional director for the American Iron and Steel Institute (AISI). From 1974-1983, he served on various SBCCI committees covering general design, fire and life safety, calculated fire resistance and hurricanes, and also served as an advisory member of the ICBO General Design and Fire and Life Safety committees.

The Geek

Sealy remembered Vognild's penchant for a certain fashion accessory. "Rick had a standing request for pocket protectors and asked that I look for them whenever I went to an engineering convention," Sealy recalled. "He always had a pocket protector with a handful of writing implements crammed inside."

And, of course, there was that dry sense of humor.

"We were at a meeting one time when the fire alarm sounded," Sealy explained. "We evacuated and, when

we returned, one of the doors that should have closed when the alarm sounded was still open. I saw that it had been opened with a very large, solid brass wedge that probably weighed five pounds. Rick commented about wishing he had that on his desk and I told him that he should take it home for it shouldn't be there. 'No, that would be stealing and I have children who look up to me,' Rick replied. But he then looked at me and said, without any visual emotion, 'You don't have children.' I hope (his son) Michael still has it."

Sealy recalled another instance, when Vognild had moved to Dallas after joining AISI and the two made their annual trek to Richardson, Texas, to visit local Building Official T. Hoyt Page.

"Each year, Hoyt would call and tell—not ask—Rick and me to meet him at his favorite barbecue joint, and after we bought lunch we would go to Hoyt's office and go through the Blue Book of proposed code changes and advise him on how he should vote and/or comment," Sealy explained. "In those days, the proposed changes were a photocopy of the proponent's actual

submittal. One particular change had been submitted with a typewriter that had a fancy, script-like font. We reviewed it and told Hoyt that his vote should be negative. When he asked why, Rick dryly responded, 'Sissy Typewriter.' Hoyt noted it that way. I asked him if he was really going to use that and he said, 'Sure, why would I question Rick?' Rick did not even smile."

Vognild's professionalism cemented his legacy with his coworkers at SBCCI.

"Rick was the ultimate professional," said Becky Cook, who joined SBCCI's new Code Development Ser-

"He had a talent for seeing a person's potential, and I learned quickly he was my advocate when I needed one. I always found him to be fair and kind in his management of employees."

vices department in 1984 and now serves with the ICC Evaluation Service. "He had a talent for seeing a person's potential, and I learned quickly he was my advocate when I needed one. I always found him to be fair and kind in his management of employees."

"The thing I remember most was Rick's professionalism and his calm guidance while getting things done,"



said former SBCCI coworker Bruce Burdette, who retired from ICC in 2005. "I can't recall a single time where he said a negative thing about a coworker. Consequently, it made him a very popular boss to work for."

"Nothing ever got him upset," Battles added. "He was always even keeled and so matter-of-fact in what he did."

"Rick was a real gentleman and an extremely sensitive person, and I don't think a lot of people realized that about him," explained ICC Member Services Vice President Karla Higgs, who recalled one SBCCI conference in Orlando, Fla., where she was unable to carry heavy items at the time. In stepped Vognild—despite his other duties at the conference. "He walked around that entire conference carrying a camera bag behind me."

Battles remembered his first SBCCI conference in Orlando, where he joined Vognild and his wife Elayne on a "family" excursion. "I had never been with Rick in a non-work related situation," Battles explained. "We finished the code hearing about a half day early, so the three of us went to Sea World and got in on the 'Family Plan.' After that conference, Elayne kindly referred to me as 'my son John.'"

"I remember another conference in Myrtle Beach, S.C., when a bunch of us went go cart riding," Battles continued. "Rick wasn't part of the group because he had other duties with the Board. When we got home and I filled out my expense report, Rick asked me why I didn't include the costs of the go carts, and I told him that was my fun time. He replied: 'If they can pay for the Board to play golf, then they can pay for you to ride go carts.'"

"He was very reasonable in the way he managed," Battles concluded. "And he always allowed me to come to him and express my concerns. He would always listen no matter what, and I thought that was really special."

"It is often said we are only as successful as those who surround us, and ICC has



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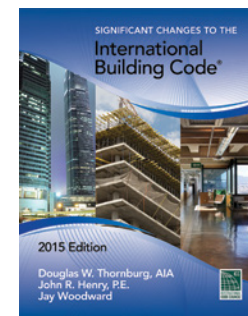
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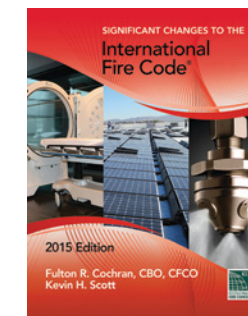
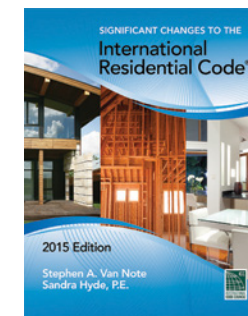


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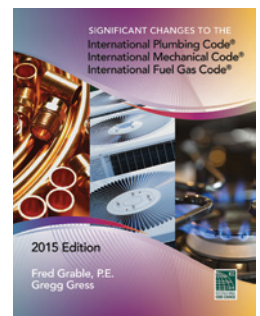
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been fortunate to have individuals such as Rick Vognild pass along their knowledge and mentor the excellent staff we have serving our Members today," said ICC Board of Directors President Guy Tomberlin. "The challenge now is identifying the new Rick Vognilds to follow in our footsteps, to help ensure the long-term success of our association and the industry."

Following his retirement, Sealy said the Vognilds relocated to "Hooterville" where Elayne concentrated on her quilting and Rick spawned a new career. "He resurrected his hippy past and started designing and producing tie-dyed fabrics for Elayne's quilts," Sealy explained. "I'm the proud owner of a 'Rickism' tie. I once told him that he should mass produce them and call them 'Rickys.' I soon learned that if you ever received a look of disdain from Richard "Rick" Vognild, it was because you had mistakenly called him Ricky."

The Vognilds eventually settled in Crossville, Tenn., and Sealy and his longtime friend stayed in touch through the years, especially via the comics section of the newspaper.

"Rick and I shared a love for cartoons or the 'Funny Pages,'" Sealy explained. "When they moved to Tennessee, the local blunder had very few funnies and especially did not have his favorites, 'One Big Happy' starring Ruthie and 'Sherman's Lagoon.'

"It's a geek thing, and for years I clipped the daily Ruthies and Shermans and once a month I would send a care package," Sealy continued. "On the first Sunday after receiving the package, Rick would make pancakes and then open the envelope and read his funnies.

"The August 2014 collection was not completed. When it came time to mail the envelope I just dropped them into the wastebasket. That was a damn sad day." **bsj**



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