Cline drawn to engineering by love of building

BY DEBRA BAKER BECK

A love for building things drew distinguished alumnus Roy Cline ('60) into engineering, and the opportunity to see projects grow from a mere idea on a drafting table or computer screen to completion has kept him going throughout his career.

He's built subways, wastewater treatment systems, power plants and a host of other projects. Every day brings new challenges, and that fact appeals to Cline.

"Rarely do you build the same thing over, in the same way," he says. "Every job is something different... You don't have much time to be bored."

The hours are long and hard, but Cline never objected to the effort it took to get to where he is today.

Cline has risen to remarkable heights in the construction industry. Today, he is president and chief executive officer of the Idaho-based Morrison Knudson Corporation, a major leadership role in the field. But the Greystull (Wyo.) High School graduate spent most of his career with Morrison Knudson Construction Corporation, rising from office engineer in 1960 to group president in 1989.

After graduating from UW in 1960, Cline took a job in San Diego as a junior engineer with the California Highway Department. He began training in design and layout of the freeway system in the San Diego County area. The interstate highway system provided many young engineers with opportunities in the late 1950s and early 1960s, and Cline joined the effort.

"At that time, the interstate system was very big and very attractive to most civil engineers," he says.

Those days in San Diego offered him many new experiences. Walking into a room full of 120 engineers drafting tables his first day on the job left a profound impression on the young Cline.

"It was my first real experience as a poor country boy out of Wyoming in a big city," he says.

Cline stayed with the CHD until April 1961, when he enlisted in the U.S. Air Force. After receiving his commission as a second lieutenant, he served as a civil engineering officer at bases in Ohio, the District of Columbia, California, Louisiana and Kansas before taking a one-year assignment (1966-67) at Cam Ranh Bay, Vietnam.

"It was a very dynamic company, and it had a reputation for the international market," Cline says. "You're out building things, it's the ingenuity and the energy of people that get it done." The commitment and long hours put forth by individuals in the engineering and construction industries have always impressed him.

Having What It Takes

After working many years in upper-level management positions, Cline has learned what it takes to be an effective leader.

"You have to have a strong sense of integrity and honesty," he says. "If you make a commitment, stick to it."

"Gaining the trust and confidence of co-workers takes a lot of hard work," according to Cline. "But the effort is rewarding."

"People work with you and for you if they have respect for you and your abilities," he says.

"You have to be willing to get right in there with everyone else, make it a team effort," he says. "We're a lot better than it."

"If you want something that has a fairly constant change to it, this is probably a good business for you," he says.

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