

Rechard's contribution to profession, UW significant

By DEBRA BAKER BECK, *Alumnews* Editor

The University of Wyoming Water Resources Research Institute may be distinguished alumnus Paul Rechard's most visible legacy, but it's hardly the first or last contribution to his alma mater or his profession.

Rechard (BS '48, MS '49, PE '55) is a renowned authority on water issues, particularly as they affect Wyoming's resources. His career has spanned the decades and covered both public sector service and private sector entrepreneurship.

Rechard took responsibility for setting up the WRRRI on campus in 1964, when federal legislation mandated establishing such facilities at each of the nation's land-grant colleges. But prior to that, the Laramie native had a long track record of service in both the state and federal governments. After ending his association with the institute in 1981, he went on to establish one of the state's most successful engineering firms. Through it all, he has developed a solid reputation as the consummate professional and a leading authority on water resources development.

Rechard knew early on that he would attend the University of Wyoming and that he would have a career that dealt with water. His father, Ottis Rechard, joined the UW mathematics faculty in 1923, eventually heading that department and serving as dean of the then-College of Liberal Arts. UW was the only logical choice for higher education in the Rechard family.

"There was never really any question in my mind that I would go to the University of Wyoming," he says.

Similarly, Rechard's interest in water dates back to his youth — young Paul began working on ranches at age 11, and he developed a strong interest in agriculture, especially irrigation.

"I just have had water on my brain" for as long as he can remember.

Paul had good early guidance. H.T. Person, then head of the UW Department of Civil Engineering, was a neighbor and family friend who inspired Rechard to channel his interest into engineering. Person, whom Rechard describes as a "second father figure," remained a constant resource to him throughout much of his career.

Rechard's earliest professional experiences came at the Bureau of Reclamation. His first stint came in the summer of 1946, after serving in the U.S. Navy. In the summer of 1947, he was employed in the Wyoming State Engineer's Office, which provided a great background in Wyoming water administration. During the summer of 1948, before he entered graduate school, he again worked for the Bureau of Reclamation. He returned to that agency after receiving his master's degree, working as a hydraulic engineer, first in Casper, then transferring to Billings, Mont., and Cody. His bureau assignments were varied. In Casper, he worked with studies related to the North Platte River reservoirs and their use for power generation and irrigation. In Billings, he worked for the bureau's regional office and handled flood hydrology studies. In Cody, where he was assistant district hydrologist, he helped plan studies for the Big Horn, Clark's Fork and Shoshone River projects.

Rechard moved to state government in 1954, when he joined the Wyoming Natural Resource Board as director of water resources and Wyoming's inter-



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state streams commissioner. This marked a transition, not only from one government branch to another, but also from a largely technical role to a more political one.

Travel dominated this position for four years, as he criss-crossed the state to work on water resources issues. Rechard worked closely with then-Gov. Milward Simpson, with water users and with consulting engineers working on a variety of water development projects. He also represented the state's interests at meetings of the National Reclamation Association and the Wyoming Water Development Association.

Wyoming's position was somewhat unique in several ways, including its status as the headwater state, its high elevation, its low population, and its relatively slow development of water resources. Other states were further along in the latter, and they were intensely interested in getting as much of our water as possible. Rechard had a crash course in negotiation and diplomacy, skills he would draw upon frequently in the future. There is no shortage of controversy when water is the subject, but Rechard finds the debate stimulating.

"It gets your adrenaline going, and that's some of the interest," he admits.

As interstate streams commissioner, Rechard both negotiated new compacts and maintained existing agreements on such resources as the Upper Colorado River and the Yellowstone River. Protecting Wyoming's interests was his primary goal in that position.

Rechard also worked to convince Congress to approve the Colorado River Storage Project, which resulted in the construction of such major projects as the Glen Canyon and Flaming Gorge dams. He traveled to Washington, D.C., to help Wyoming Rep.

Keith Thomson lobby for approval of the project.

Rechard left that position in 1958 to take a job as principal hydraulic engineer for the Upper Colorado River Commission in Salt Lake City. Weary of the constant travel, and with a young son at home, he saw taking this position as a way to step off the road for a bit. But while he enjoyed the skiing (Rechard was on UW's first ski team after World War II), "I couldn't get Wyoming out of my blood, and I wanted to come back." He did, not just to his home state, but to his hometown.

As the first WRRRI director, Rechard had the challenge of establishing a completely new program. The university contributed his salary (he also taught civil engineering), and the federal government provided \$100,000 to fund research. To extend the institute's resources, Rechard and other staff members identified grant resources, from both private industry and federal agencies interested in water issues. They succeeded in that effort — by the time he left in 1981, the institute had approximately \$2 million in grants for funding research programs.

When he left the institute, he decided to try the private sector. Rechard joined with Doyl Fritz (BS '68) of Sheridan to start their own firm as Western Water Consultants.

Since this was their first foray into the private sector, "we developed from the ground up."

"Doyl and I developed our ideas, personnel policies, our approach to work. We've been very fortunate" that the combination has worked so well over the years.

Since neither partner wanted to leave his hometown, WWC opened two offices immediately, in Laramie and in Sheridan. A third office opened in Casper, when WWC consulted with Texaco on environmental work while it closed its refinery there. A Texaco employee joined the WWC staff shortly after that plant folded and took over operation of the Casper office. They opened a fourth office, in Gillette, to help Sheridan staff handle the growing demand from coal interests. Today, the four sites employ approximately 60 people, many of them UW graduates.

As the staff has grown, so has the company's capabilities. WWC still handles water resources, environmental and mining issues. Staff members developed the water resources master plan for the city of Laramie, supervised the drilling of the spur well north of town and drilled a well in the Soldier Springs area to the south. It still does significant work at the major surface mines around Sheridan and Gillette and is helping the city of Casper with environmental clean-up problems at its landfill and design a raw balefill facility and is helping clean-up an Amoco site in that area.

The staff also has expanded into design of highway projects, such as the cut-off between Bosler and Wheatland. Convincing the Wyoming Department of Transportation that a water engineering company could handle highway projects was a challenge, so the firm set up WWC Engineering, marketing a full array of services.

In the future, Rechard sees expansion of the highway design and municipal engineering work. He also anticipates greater involvement in the future of geographic information systems (GIS), particularly

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for municipal clients. The core services, mining and environmental work, will remain staples; but they are not anticipated to be growth areas.

The key, Rechard says, is to diversify their operations and avoid boom-and-bust cycles.

Biographical Information

Paul and his wife, Mary Lou (BA '49), have two children: Rob (BS '78, MS '80) and Karen Rechard Davis (BS '85, MB '88).

Paul is a life member of the UW Alumni Association and a member of the Cowboy Joe Club. He has played a significant leadership role in the Laramie Lions Club since 1964, serving as its president in 1968. He also has been active in the Albany County United Way since 1980, the United Presbyterian Church since 1965, the Sigma Nu house board since 1994, and the Laramie Lodge No. 3 AF&AM since 1964.

Professional affiliations include: Sigma Tau, Phi Kappa Phi, Sigma Xi, Gamma Sigma Delta, American Society of Civil Engineers (fellow and life member).

Among his many honors: *Who's Who in America*, *Who's Who in Engineering*, *American Men and Women in Science*, *Who's Who in Finance and Industry*, Tau Beta Pi Wyoming eminent engineer (1993), and honorary member of Wyoming Engineering Society.