

The IDC experience with Ken Durant



Ken Durant

It's taken hundreds of talented, forward-thinking and dedicated people to shape IDC into the uniquely dynamic and nimble company

it is today. One of these creative thinkers, Ken Durant, who has led the company since its inception, recently stepped down as president.

Long-time colleagues described him as hard-shelled with a soft underside. A businessman's businessman. A guy who shies from the spotlight and sees himself in a supporting role to those delivering client service.

"He is a people person and looks out for his staff, but he is a hard driver," said retired colleague Rick Reid.

Durant earned his civil engineering degree from Oregon State University and began his professional career in California's timber industry. But his college relationship with Arlen Borgen, a now retired CH2M HILL and IDC employee, led Durant to the firm in 1969.

Durant first worked in the firm's water division serving public clients, but his interests were elsewhere.

"It was Ken's goal when he came to CH2M that he could provide consulting services to private-sector clients," said colleague LaMont Matthews.

That he did. Durant joined the firm's small, Portland, Ore.-based Industrial and Energy Services Division. The problem for the struggling 34-person staff was that CH2M HILL was structured to serve public clients. To meet the demands of delivering public works projects, the firm had a higher overhead rate and pricing structure, which was a hard sell to potential industrial clients.

But CH2M HILL did win two landmark industrial projects in the early 1980s that caused more than a buzz through the firm. One was for Union Carbide. The other more influential project was to build a silicon manufacturing facility in Portland. It was for Germany-based Wacker

Siltronics, which hired locally based CH2M HILL for its diverse skills.

These projects and the missed opportunity for another major project due to pricing underscored the importance of forming a separate company to delve into the private arena and serve a broader client base.

As the manager of the industrial division, Durant led the effort to create a company that would operate independently of CH2M HILL. It would have its own board of directors as well as a separate accounting and banking system. It would be a company with low overhead that could hire contract employees as needed but would have the flexibility to reduce staff



During Ken Durant's career he has enjoyed many successes, but none were more challenging or rewarding than helping mold IDC into an industry leader.

Dealing out a Durantism

Ken Durant turned to Wayne Hanson, who was having one of "those days," and said, "If you think being a vice president at IDC is frustrating, get promoted."

A compelling query

When Harlan Moyer first became CH2M HILL's president in 1978, he visited the Portland, Ore., office and, by happenstance, stopped by Ken Durant's office. The conversation went something like this:

Moyer: Hi, Ken, I'm Harlan Moyer.

Durant: Hello. How are things going?

Moyer: Real good.

Durant: Then why aren't we making more money?

In a recent interview, Moyer said he knew after he first crossed paths with Durant that he'd better keep an eye on this promising employee.

to meet the cyclical trends of private industry that are not prevalent in the firm's traditional government-funded work.

His team "made a convincing case to me," said former CH2M HILL Chief Executive Harlan Moyer, "and a recommendation was then made to the (CH2M HILL) board."

An embryonic and historic year, 1985 was the beginning of Durant's most satisfying career challenge. He and the entire industrial division left CH2M HILL and opened the doors to IDC. There were thorny moments early on that included laying off half the staff in the first six months. But all that quickly changed as the company gained ground in the marketplace and as the electronics industry emerged to become the largest industry in the world.

"We found a niche in the semiconductor industry and grew with the industry," said IDC's Wayne Hanson.

With offices worldwide, IDC has become a powerhouse in bringing fast-track industrial construction projects to fruition, and it has become a provider of choice to industry leaders such as Intel. There were two years that the company turned down more work

than it accepted and, during difficult times for CH2M HILL, IDC financially propped up the enterprise.

The company has weathered three major economic valleys with the electronics industry, including the current slump, which is the industry's most sustained economic morass.

To hedge against the industry's cyclical nature, IDC in recent years has placed more emphasis on diversifying by building up an array of service for industries such as food and beverages, pharmaceuticals, and biotechnology.

IDC has enjoyed the benefits of staffing extraordinarily talented people who have made the company one of two major providers worldwide that specialize in building advanced manufacturing facilities. Durant knows well that the company's success is based on the success of its project managers.

"The important people serve clients; everybody else (including the president) serves them," said Durant.

Durant stepped down as president at the beginning of the year and leaves his post as a CH2M HILL board member in February, a position he first was elected to in 1981. For the foreseeable future, he'll be working at IDC part time while turning his attention to other interests.

Reflecting on his tenure as IDC president, Durant said, "It couldn't have been more fun."

George Lemmon named IDC president



George Lemmon

George Lemmon, who joined CH2M HILL two years ago and has a rich background in engineering, construction and executive leadership, was appointed president of IDC effective Jan. 1. Lemmon will continue to be president of the firm's Energy and Industrial Services Business Unit. Prior to joining CH2M HILL, Lemmon was an executive with Washington Group, Raytheon Engineering & Constructors and Ebasco Services.
