

MY MISSION IN LIFE

By Luigi Grande, Retired AIA



Some of you may still remember me as a Senior Architect with that incredible employee-owned firm called CH2M HILL. For 36 continuous years, I was in the WDC office.

I retired from the firm in 2014, even though Ned Johnson wanted me to stay for a bit longer. I assumed that my retirement would start immediately, but I received an offer from Emad Farouz (still a Jacobs employee) to become an Owner Representative and lead the expansion of the St. Mark Coptic Orthodox Church in Fairfax, Virginia. He was a Member Representative of that church. The anticipated duration for that project was 1 year, and I accepted the offer. Due to site conditions, though, the work extended to about 2 years. The project was successful; and, if I may say so, CH2M HILL's high quality standards were maintained throughout the work.

On March 3, 2017, I experienced a drastic change: I lost the love of my life, Diane, after 47 wonderful years of marriage. I found that I needed to occupy myself even more trying to cope with this situation. One of the many avenues available to me was to join the choir at church and eventually start taking singing lessons with a very talented Korean voice teacher named Eun-Ah Roh. I worked under her supervision for 5.5 years, and she totally changed my vocal style and approach. To this day, I enjoy those memories and still appreciate her teaching abilities. Eun-Ah helped me discover a hidden talent for singing and brought it to life. She recently relocated with her husband in Las Vegas, but we still communicate and update each other.

Singing has been such an enjoyable activity, something that keeps my mind and soul happy and allows me to meet a lot of talented people with the same interest. Singing has also been a sort of mental therapy. Although I have no desire for a second career, I will continue to pursue singing. I especially enjoy showing the

younger generation that even ancient folks such as I can still perform if they're passionate and enjoy what they're doing!

At an early age, I embarked on a career as an architect. Thankfully, I was blessed with a profoundly satisfying career. Architects are artists in the sense that they create buildings and shapes from their imagination, plus they must have the technical ability and skills to accommodate not only client expectations but also regulations and special requirements.

My career with CH2M HILL was deeply rewarding and much more demanding than singing. However, singing does require certain skills, such as memorizing the music and words, plus acting. At my age, that required a real commitment! I had to prove that I still had the brain power left to do it... ha-ha!

This year, for the second year in a row, I traveled to Novafeltria, Italy, near Rimini to attend a 5-week opera singing program sponsored by La Musica Lirica.

Attendees came from all over the world, such as Australia, Iceland, England, Italy, India, and the USA. At the end of the program, my daughter, with her husband and kids, spent 10 more days sightseeing, including Rome (Colosseum, Pantheon, Trevi Fountain, Castel Sant'Angelo, Saint Peter's Basilica, Altare della Patria);

Naples (Pompeii, Napoli Cathedral); and Venice (St. Mark's Square and Basilica, Rialto Bridge, Doge's Palace, Teatro La Fenice, Grand Canal, Merano Tour, Burano Tour, etc.).

One delightful surprise happened during a gondola tour of the Venice canals. I thought hearing the gondolier sing would be fantastic, especially as we floated through the narrow canals. I asked him to sing; but he apologized, saying that he couldn't carry a tune. Well, I surprised even myself by taking the lead and singing. I received a lot of applause and smiles from people cruising by us in other gondolas. It was a thrill to sing in public in such a historic place.

For the singing program, I was in the division for advanced singers who are ready to begin or have already started a career as an opera singer. Obviously, I'm doing it for other reasons, as explained above. The rehearsals were run on a

professional level. During the first 4 weeks, each participant received up to 20 hours of Italian per week, two half-hour weekly coaching sessions with Rossini Opera Festival coaches, and two 45-minute voice lessons per week. During the fifth week, the students were able to participate in Master Classes with the



resident faculty. The operas were double-cast.

Those participants cast in roles performed two of the four fully-staged performances with a professional orchestra under the direction of Maestro Joseph Rescigno.

This year, I participated in only one of the four fully-staged performances: “Falstaff” (2.5-hr show) by Giuseppe Verdi with full orchestration.

I also took part in two scenes and two song recitals. Last year, I participated in one of the four fully-staged performances called “La Boheme” (2.5-hr show) by Giacomo Puccini, plus scenes and recitals. It was incredible to take part in this celebration of works from such masters of music!

So the moral of the story to my brothers and sisters from CH2M HILL is to follow your passion, get involved with things you really like to do, perhaps things that you put on the back burner for one reason or another. You are never too old to enjoy life; as a matter of fact, you may be able to inspire other people to enjoy life too. They may think “If that fellow can do it, I can too.” It’s always therapeutic to stay curious and find new interests!



Hopefully, God will continue to give me good health so that I can continue to pursue my mission in life. Love always to my brothers and sisters from CH2M HILL.

