

Winchester's Golden Graduates Gene Cover: From Classmate to Class Act!

By Pat Knasinski, Winchester Alumni Association

The M.W. Kellogg Company, a century-old engineering firm founded in New York City, now headquartered in Houston, TX, designs and builds oil refineries, chemical plants, fertilizer complexes and LNG liquefaction plants all over the world. Among their career chemical engineers is a graduate of Winchester High School, Class of 1959. Gene Cover helped to develop chemical processes to make chlorine from hydrogen chloride, concentrated nitric acid, coal gasification and water pollution control. He spent a number of years working on Kellogg's synthetic ammonia process. In addition to research and development, Cover managed major international projects for Kellogg and has published over 30 scholarly articles on chemical process technologies. Gene Cover is a Winchester Golden Graduate!

Gene Cover grew up in Winchester in a modest home on West Washington Street, bought during the Great Depression. Mike and Olive Kabel Cover raised three sons: John, Bob, and Gene. Mike was a well-known local plumber and electrician. The boys worked alongside their father and learned the value of his trade as well as the importance of education. The Covers were unassuming people—just did their very best in all things and taught their sons to do likewise. At his Senior Honors Program in the spring of 1959, Gene was named Valedictorian of his graduating class, and was the most surprised person in the room!

Gene continued to spend his summers working with his Dad and realized one day that he could continue a life of "digging ditches," or he could try to get a college education. Tuition in 1959 was \$110 per semester—a lot of money back then! Unsure of himself and his abilities and not knowing how to pay the bills, he applied for admission to Purdue University. Winchester's Charlie Stonerock was one of his friends who encouraged Gene to attend Purdue and pursue chemical engineering. Cover was concerned that he might not be able to compete at the university level because he had known several other students who had gone to college and flunked out. But, with a determined attitude and a state-awarded scholarship in hand, he embarked on his college career.

To his surprise, Gene tested out of freshman English, chemistry, and math, and found himself in Purdue's Honors Program. As Gene says, "Who knew that Winchester High School was teaching advanced placement classes back in the 1950's!" He realizes that he and his classmates were blessed with talented teachers like Emerson Martin in math, Richard Lawrence in chemistry, Joseph Casey in English, and Glen Myers, who loved to give pop quizzes in math. But most importantly, these teachers took a personal interest in having their students excel in their studies and even spent time after school helping them on extra studies. Mr. Martin introduced Gene and his classmate, Max Gruendl, to the joys of astronomy when Mr. Martin showed them the amazing rings of Saturn and the moons of Jupiter for the first time through his telescope. As a result, astronomy became a life-long interest for Gene. Glen Myers also took a special interest in him and today Gene recalls the memorable conversation he had with him regarding his plans for college. Gene calls his teachers "unsung heroes," as they played an extraordinary role in his developing future. As he says, "Education of the masses was a great idea to make our country great, but teachers made it happen. Winchester has had more than its share of gifted teachers!"

Youngest in his family, but the first to graduate from college, Gene earned his degree in Chemical Engineering from Purdue. Older brother Bob received his electrical engineering degree the following year, as he had taken time out from college to serve in the US Army and to get married.

Armed with his diploma, Gene immediately went to work for The M.W. Kellogg Company in New York City in their research and development department. Within a short time, Kellogg awarded Gene a scholarship to attend the University of Delaware for his Master's Degree in Chemical Engineering, while on full salary and tuition.

Upon return to full time work, he moved into Kellogg's fertilizer group. Kellogg's synthetic ammonia process is responsible for over half the world's production of ammonia, used as a crop fertilizer, and has been hailed as helping to alleviate some of the world's hunger by making farms more productive through the use of low-cost nitrogen-based fertilizers, such as ammonium nitrate, ammonium sulfate and urea. Gene notes that the anhydrous ammonia that farmers use right here in Randolph County, Indiana, is likely produced in Kellogg-designed plants. His work in ammonia process technology led him to manage projects in Canada, China, as well as the US Gulf Coast for Kellogg. During his career, Gene published over thirty technical articles on a variety of chemical process technologies.

However, the best was yet to come. Gene specialized in the design of first-of-a-kind chemical processes. New processes create special problems to the plant design engineers. With a proven track record of successfully designing new processes and solving new problems, Gene was assigned to manage a group of 230 engineers to do the conceptual design of new-generation chemical plants. He describes this assignment as the most interesting, rewarding and challenging assignment at Kellogg and the highlight of his career.

While Gene was in management for most of his career, he always tried to keep his technical skills sharp. He became Kellogg's representative to Particulate Solid Research Inc. (PSRI), an industry-sponsored research consortium that studies design issues associated with fluidized beds. Most of the gasoline used today is made in a fluidized bed process called catalytic cracking that Kellogg invented during World War II to increase the yield of gasoline from crude oil. Gene eventually became chairman of the board of directors, a post he held until his retirement in 2001.

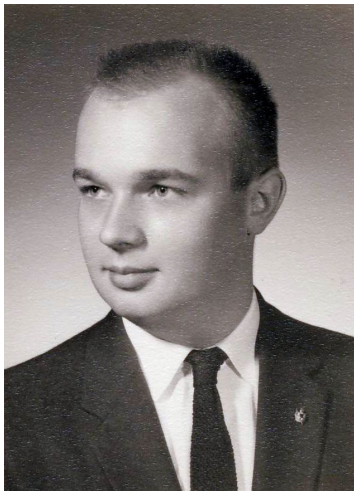
But, there's more to Gene Cover's story. At the same time that he was experiencing tremendous professional success, he became a Christian and faced a personal challenge: how to be a follower of Christ in a secular work environment. As he developed new chemical processes, he also developed his personal philosophy. In the end, his philosophy became the great determiner of his professional success. His philosophy was to get to know well each person with whom he worked, to treat each one with respect and fairness, and to make sure each person felt they were heard in the work environment. He was confident that he had made some progress in his pursuit. However, at his retirement party, it became obvious from multiple comments from his colleagues that indeed his abundance of faith, family, friends, and integrity were among his greatest achievements. Gene hopes that his treatment of people in a Christ-like manner is the primary characteristic for which he will be remembered.

In retirement, he continues as an elder in his church, recording clerk of his church's Session, and officer in the Presbytery. He and his wife, Linda, have served their congregation for over 30 years and now enjoy knowing and mentoring the younger members. Cover also takes every opportunity to tell grade school students about careers in science and technology and regularly participates in Career Day in his home community in Houston. But he also tells the children the importance of language arts and

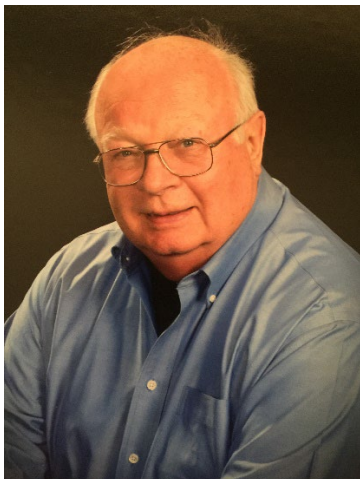
their need to master oral and written communications. The ability to communicate effectively will have a bearing on their future success in areas of science and technology. Cover also continues as a life-long learner. He has learned to lay railroad track and become a certified train conductor and locomotive engineer on a 7 ¼ inch gauge railroad in Texas. He has returned to wood-turning, a skill learned in WHS's wood shop class years ago. He plays the piano for worship services at a nursing home and with his wife, enjoys travel and bird watching in exotic places. Photography and a love of wild flowers led him to develop a photo presentation on wildflowers found in their home county in Texas.

In retrospect, Gene feels very blessed to have grown up in small-town Winchester and to have received a quality education here which continues to serve him. Gene Cover has gone from classmate to class act!

Gene Cover in 1959



Gene Cover today



Editor's Note: Pat Knasinski is a life-long resident of Winchester, graduate of Driver High School, Indiana University Bloomington, and Ball State University. She retired as WCHS Spanish teacher in 2005 and now serves on the Winchester Alumni Association Board of Directors. If you have comments about this series of articles or know of other Winchester graduates who should be included in our series, please email her at winchesteralumni@yahoo.com