CEP Chemical Engineering Progress

AIChE

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Half-Full or Half-Empty?

Engineers are trained to solve problems. So we naturally look for problems to solve and solutions to optimize. And that often leads us to first see the emptiness of a situation rather than appreciate its fullness. (Interestingly, my first title for this piece was "Half-Empty or Half-Full?," until I realized the irony.)

If you Google the terms "half full empty engineer," you can find many amusing takes on how an engineer views the glass: It's twice as big as it needs to be. More data are needed. It has a 100% design margin. The 8-oz glass has 4 oz of liquid in it. More-precise measurements would show that the liquid level is either minutely higher or minutely lower than the halfway mark. And finally, the volume of the cylinder is divided into two equal parts: one containing a colorless, odorless liquid, the other a colorless, odorless gas; thus, the cylinder is neither full nor empty, but rather, each half of the cylinder is full, one with a gas, one with a liquid.

For months, the Centennial Celebration Committee's Awards and Recognition Subcommittee has worked diligently to compile lists of those who have contributed to the chemical engineering profession and society in a variety of ways. *CEP* is publishing these lists throughout the year, starting with forerunners of the profession in January, followed by chemical engineers in space in March, mileposts of professional and Institute progress" in April, and "Twenty Chemical Engineers in Other Pursuits" on pp. 62–63 of this issue. In future months, look for contributions of chemical engineering to society's well-being, industrial executives, authors of groundbreaking chemical engineering books, and chemical engineers of the foundation era (before and during World War II) and the modern era (after World War II).

With so many outstanding accomplishments and important chemical engineers to choose from, committee members sometimes engaged in significant debate before arriving at their final selections. They recognized from the outset that these lists could generate much discussion among AIChE members as well, and indeed welcome such input.

And, being engineers, *CEP's* readers did not disappoint.

The first list prompted a letter pointing out that it did not include any women and noting the accomplishments of Ellen Swallow Richards, the first woman student — and later professor — at MIT, who introduced the word *ecology* in the U.S. in 1892. You can read about her at www.inventions.org/culture/science/women/richards.html.

We also learned about Charles Pierce, the first African-American chemical engineer in the U.S. In 1901, he was the first graduate of Armour Institute of Technology's (now the Illinois Institute of Technology) chemical engineering program. You can read about him at www.iit.edu/engineering/news/.

If you would like to suggest additions to the published lists, write to us at cepedit@aiche.org. We will publish these in the Letters section of future issues, and add the information to the AIChE Centennial website (www.aiche.org/About/Centennial/Index.aspx).

However, please don't focus on the name you think should have been included but didn't make the final cut. Instead, appreciate all the hard work and careful consideration that went into compiling the lists, and realize that the glass of chemical engineering accomplishments is indeed a cup that overflows.

Cynthia Mascone, Editor-in-Chief