Where are the Giants?

Monday, May 11, 2009

12:00 – 13:00

Room 2355 GGBL

Speaker: Robert Bachus, PhD, PE, Principal, Geosyntec Consultants, Atlanta, Georgia

Abstract

Professor George Sowers surprised the local and national geotechnical community when he delivered his 1979 Terzaghi Lecture in Atlanta titled “There Were Giants on the Earth in Those Days.” While the audience may have been surprised by the content of the lecture, which was part anthropology and part geotechnical in nature as Professor Sowers viewed projects executed in pre-Columbian time, his message was clear... we have a lot to learn from our ancestors with regards to civil and geotechnical engineering. It has been almost 30 years since the 1981 Terzaghi Lecture. Have we heeded George’s challenge and have we advanced geotechnical practice?

This presentation will focus on two main themes. The first theme will explore some of the notable (i.e., giant) projects that help define the modern geotechnical engineering practice. With input from some esteemed colleagues well known to the audience (as well as from members of the audience), Dr. Bachus will review and highlight several landmark projects, as well as two from his recent experience. Emphasis will be placed on the lessons that have been learned from these projects. The second theme takes a step into the future and attempts to identify the “giant” problems that society and the geotechnical community will be called upon to address. Again, the audience will be asked to share its perspective.

The Practice of geotechnical engineering is fascinating. As Professor Sowers indicated in 1981, we owe a lot to our ancestors. We will show that we have also learned a lot from our relatively recent projects. While we have learned much, there is much more that we can do as geotechnical engineers in practice to help the future generations of geo-practitioners.