

## **Remembering Jack Stephens**

The late Jack Stephens, professor emeritus of Civil & Environmental Engineering (CEE), played a pivotal role in shaping Connecticut's transportation-related governance and research infrastructure and was a well-known pavement expert, and at UConn — where he taught for nearly 40 years — he was widely regarded as a university treasure. As part of our Professors Remembered campaign, donors may contribute to the Jack E. Stephens Scholarship Fund in Civil Engineering [here](#).

Like many of his generation, Jack's service during World War II shaped his life. In 1941, while studying chemistry at Miami Oxford University in Ohio, Jack joined the military. Due to high scores on Army aptitude tests, he was assigned to the Army Specialized Training Program (ASTP) in Storrs, CT, where he studied engineering. During the war the ASTP sent 220,000 soldiers to 227 colleges throughout the U.S. to take accelerated courses in various branches of engineering, medicine, dentistry, personnel psychology, and dozens of foreign languages. Shortly after D Day, the ASTP was phased out and the soldiers were assigned elsewhere, often as replacements for casualties in frontline units. That's how in 1945 Jack became an infantryman serving in General Patton's famed Third Army as it marched from Kaiserslautern, Germany to Linz, Austria. He came home in December 1946 with two Bronze Stars and the Belgian Cross Second Class.



At the conclusion of his military service, Jack returned to UConn to complete his degree, receiving his B.S. in civil engineering in 1947. Attending UConn was instrumental not only to his career but also his personal life: it was here that he met his wife of 59 years, the former Virginia Ives (UConn '49, who died in September '10) while she was a student secretary to Engineering Dean John Lampe.

Jack began his engineering career building bridges with the Connecticut Department of Transportation (ConnDOT). He interrupted his career to pursue graduate degrees, first at Yale, then Purdue, then the University of California at Berkeley, and back to Purdue, where he ultimately earned both his M.S. ('55) and Ph.D. ('59) degrees. It was during his graduate years that he first kindled his interest in pavement technology.

After returning to UConn to join the Civil Engineering (CE) Department as a faculty member, he became involved in state and regional transportation issues. Together with Edward Gant, he was instrumental in convincing the 1962 Connecticut State Legislature to create a continuing Joint Highway Research Project between the Connecticut Department of Transportation and UConn; this program is now called the Connecticut Cooperative Transportation Research Program (Note: the program was not funded in 2010 due to state budget cuts). In addition to being a well-loved instructor, Jack served as Department Head of the CE Department from 1965-72. Long-time colleague John DeWolf, professor emeritus of CEE, added that Jack served for many years on the University Senate and won the high regard of faculty across the entire campus along with several UConn Presidents.

CEE professor Mike Accorsi recalled one incident that illustrated Jack's penchant for frugality. "I remember my first 'road trip' with him in 1985, soon after I arrived at UConn. A large construction material testing company in New Jersey was relocating and wanted to donate their remaining lab supplies and equipment to UConn. Jack saw this as an excellent way to acquire useful supplies and equipment for our labs. So we drove down to New Jersey with a rental truck. When we arrived and found the large facility loaded with good equipment, Jack's face lit up like a child's in a candy store. We spent the day loading glassware, instruments and other equipment into the truck. Toward the end of the day, we entered the last room of the facility and spied a gargantuan, two-story tall, 500-ton mechanical testing machine. Jack admired this machine and with great enthusiasm he discussed the possibility of emptying the truck to make room for this massive machine, which was probably 10 times the weight of the vehicle itself. With deep regret, he finally agreed to leave it behind, but years later, he would reminisce about the 'big one' that got away."

Jack was also a driving force behind the founding of the Connecticut Transportation Institute (CTI) in Storrs in 1974, which he oversaw as the first director. In 1984, along with Charlie Dougan, he formed the Technology Transfer (T2) Center, a unit of CTI providing training for town employees across the region, and the Connecticut Advanced Pavement Laboratory, which focuses on the development and testing of hot-mix bituminous concrete.

James Mahoney, Executive Program Director of the CTI, remembers Jack fondly. The two spent many hours together at CTI, and Jim shared some anecdotes about his mentor's affinity for the ubiquitous 'Golden Arches.' "Jack loved to eat at McDonald's. Anytime we would go on a road trip we always had to stop and eat at McDonald's at least once. There was one time we stopped at a diner to grab something for lunch; when we walked in, he took one look around and announced that 'this place is too fancy for us.' He remembered that there was a McDonald's on the other side of the highway and that is where we ended up having lunch."

Jim continued, “Jack always used unique landmarks to give directions to places such as ‘when you see the water tower, take the next exit off the highway.’ This was especially true of McDonald’s. Once when I was traveling to Penn State, Jack recommended a shortcut – ‘You’ll travel for a quite awhile across a wooded road and then, out of nowhere, you will see the biggest McDonald’s you have ever seen. At that point, take a right.’ To my amazement, he was right.”

John DeWolf added that Jack was also, to his knowledge, “The only UConn engineering professor who was featured in Star Magazine. They did a feature on pot holes in pavement for which they interviewed Jack. The accompanying photo depicted him bent over a pot hole, holding a magnifying glass while looking at the pot hole.”

Jack retired in 1989 but remained very active as a Public Service Specialist with the Connecticut Technology Transfer Center (T2) and a Senior Research Advisor to the Connecticut Advanced Pavement Lab (CAP Lab) at UConn until his death at age 83 in 2007.

Jack received many awards and honors during his career, including the UConn Alumni Association’s Distinguished Public Service Award (‘82), the Engineering Alumni Award (‘86) and the Connecticut section of ASCE Benjamin Wright Award (‘89). Read more about Jack [here](#).

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