

July 1999

Department of Chemical Engineering Graduates
Michigan State University

Dear Friends of the Department,

Hello once again! I am happy to write you with news of the college and department. We have had a number of exciting things happen. Among the most important is that we have a new Dean at last. As you may know, Ted Bickart resigned as Dean of the College of Engineering last summer to become the President of the Colorado School of Mines. George VanDusen has been the acting dean for the past year and has done a great job—we are grateful for his efforts.

Our new Dean is Dr. Janie M. Fouke, who is currently director of Bioengineering and Environmental Systems Engineering at the National Science Foundation. Dean Fouke will assume her new position here on September 1. An electrical engineer by training, Janie graduated from the University of North Carolina and has been a professor of biomedical engineering at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland. She is a warm and friendly person who describes herself as a “North Carolina farm girl.” Dean Fouke combines great personal charm with excellent leadership skills and a very clear vision to move the college forward, particularly to improve our interactions with other parts of the University. I was on the search committee that recruited Dr. Fouke and other very fine candidates for the position. I am certain she will be a superb dean. (Besides that, Janie told me she thinks chemical engineering at State is an outstanding department. She is obviously a very smart person! ☺)

Evidence continues to accumulate that we are indeed an outstanding program. For example, Dr. Carl Lira was recently honored with an Amoco Foundation Excellence-in-Teaching Award. To win this award in competition with every other faculty member in the university is impressive enough, but when you consider that Carl won this award while teaching undergraduate thermodynamics—well, that is an out and out miracle! Carl is the second of our faculty members to win this very competitive award: Dr. Dennis Miller also won it a few years ago.

Dr. Mark Worden and Dr. Daina Briedis won another very competitive award from the National Science Foundation to develop new methods of training chemical engineers in multidisciplinary teams. Mark and Daina have created a new undergraduate bioprocessing laboratory that teams chemical engineers with microbiologists and biochemists to attack and solve problems in the biotechnology and pharmaceutical industries. Our students love this exciting course that gives them the opportunity to apply their skills in a new area while working in depth with other students whose background is very far from engineering.

I continue to receive many interesting letters from you. Thanks very much. I am impressed by how flexible and resourceful chemical engineers are. We seem to be able to take a lemon and make great lemonade. (It's that processing background- always thinking about how to add value to a raw material!) ☺

I would like to share one letter that I received from Mr. Joe Stewart, "51", who operates his own consulting business in Mexico City. I tried at first to abstract parts of his letter but it is so good and so funny that I thought I would just let Joe speak for himself, so with his permission I have attached the whole letter. I hope you enjoy it as much as I did. I am looking forward to meeting Joe when I travel to Mexico next spring on University business. All of the faculty will be trying to meet more of you as we travel.

You may have heard the press conference that Phil Johnson, former coach of the Chicago Bulls, held when he took over the coaching job for the Los Angeles Lakers. A reporter mentioned the complex plays that Johnson would be expecting his players to execute and then asked if he thought that the Lakers were up to that mental effort. Johnson replied (approximately), "No, it's not that hard, this isn't chemical engineering."

So we have arrived, folks! People will no longer say "It's not rocket science," but rather "It's not chemical engineering". Go chemical engineers, go State! Or as Joe Stewart would say it- Viva ingenieros quimicos, viva State!

Or as I might say it, until our next letter, "Hasta la vista, amigos!"

Sincerely yours,

Bruce E. Dale
Professor and Chair of the Department