



Donald W. Putney

DONALD W. GENTRY

1943–2012

Elected in 1996

“For contributions to understanding rock mass responses in long-wall coal mining, improvements in mining education, professional development, and public service.”

BY THOMAS J. O’NEIL

DONALD W. GENTRY, a leading international figure in mining engineering education and minerals development, died on July 2, 2012, after a lingering illness. He was 69. Mining engineering is one of the smallest engineering fields and thus relies on a relatively small cadre of articulate, visionary leaders to make its case to the world. For decades, Don filled an important role in this capacity, and he will be sorely missed by his many mining friends everywhere.

Born in Alhambra, Illinois, some 40 miles northwest of St. Louis, Don was raised on a farm but decided to follow his grandfather’s career in mining. He entered the University of Illinois in 1961 where he not only excelled academically but also was first chair trumpet in the Fighting Illini marching band. He was also an accomplished pianist and was pleased that his children developed a love of music as well. However, it was the excitement of minerals discovery and development that was his abiding interest, leading to a lifelong passion for his profession.

After his graduation in 1965, Don earned an MS from the Mackay School of Mines at the University of Nevada, where he broadened his education in mineral exploration strategies and mineral property evaluation. This was followed by a number of industrial assignments of increasing responsibility for the Anaconda Company.

He had always planned to return for a doctorate and a career in mining engineering education, and completed his PhD at the University of Arizona in 1972, focusing on rock mechanics. This work carried over to the Colorado School of Mines, where he began a 26-year career. His important research on rock mass response to longwall coal mining in steeply dipping strata helped to propel his career and he advanced rapidly to the rank of professor in 1979. From 1983 to 1990 he was dean of engineering and undergraduate studies at Mines, followed by five years as head of the Department of Mining Engineering.

In 1998, Don retired from the Colorado School of Mines as professor emeritus and became president, chairman, and CEO of PolyMet Mining Corporation, where he spent the next five years advancing a large nickel, copper, and platinum group minerals project in northern Minnesota. He also served on the boards of directors of several other mining companies, including Santa Fe Gold Corporation and Newmont Mining Corporation. At the time of his death, he remained active as a director of Gryphon Gold Corp.

In his later years at Mines and after his retirement from education, Don became increasingly interested in the financial aspects of mine project assessment, investment decision analysis, project financing, and corporate investment strategies. He earned a strong international reputation in these areas as he presented more than 60 short courses, authored more than 100 papers, and coauthored the textbook *Mine Investment Analysis* (1984), which became the standard in nearly all mining engineering programs. He was particularly active in helping to restructure mineral policies and related taxation issues, both for developing nations and for Native American tribes. He consulted extensively on this topic in Chile, Argentina, Peru, and Brazil.

Don was very active in his profession. He chaired the Accreditation Commission of the Accreditation Board of Engineering and Technology (ABET), and served in a great many capacities for the Society for Mining, Metallurgy, and Exploration (SME) and the American Institute of Mining, Metallurgical, and Petroleum Engineers (AIME), including as

president of SME in 1993 and of AIME in 1996. He initiated a strategic planning process at SME that has served the Society very well. He remained devoted to SME throughout his career, particularly with respect to its programs on leadership development for young engineers. He also dedicated a great deal of time to the National Academy of Engineering after his election in 1996, serving in all leadership positions of Section 11, Earth Resources Engineering.

A list of Don's awards and honors would be very long. Among them would be his selection as an ABET Fellow; 1987 Henry Krumb lecturer for AIME; recipient of the 1991 AIME Mineral Industry Education Award, 1998 SME Daniel C. Jackling Award, and 1998 AIME Mineral Economics Award; and election in 1992 as a Distinguished Member of SME. He was named an Outstanding Alumnus of the Mackay School of Mines in 1992 and was awarded an honorary doctor of engineering degree from the University of Arizona in 2002. In 1996 he was named an AusIMM/AIME Distinguished Lecturer, and he considered the associated speaking tour in Australia one of the highlights of his career.

Don Gentry was a natural leader and an exceptionally talented engineer and educator. He was direct and plain spoken, and his work ethic was remarkable. He always delivered and had little time for those who didn't. A colleague once commented, "Make sure you really want it done before asking Don to do it, because it *will* get done—and fast."

Aside from his commitment to his family and his profession, his other love was hunting and fishing, which he vigorously pursued around the world. He loved his Arkansas retirement home where he could walk out the back door to his boat house and go bass fishing.

Don is survived by his wife of 47 years (and high school sweetheart), Sheila, daughter Tara, son Chad, four granddaughters, and younger brother Darrell.