



Jonas Portrait Photography, Pittsburgh, PA

William N. Poundstone

WILLIAM N. POUNDSTONE

1925–2015

Elected in 1977

*“Contributions to the development of improved
underground coal mining technology.”*

BY STAN SUBOLESKI

WILLIAM NICHOLAS POUNDSTONE, an unparalleled innovator in coal mining and former executive vice president of Consolidation Coal (now Consol Energy), died July 3, 2015, at the age of 89, in Jupiter Island, Florida.

Bill was born in Morgantown, West Virginia, on August 12, 1925, the son of J. Stanley and Lena Grace Poundstone. His father was a Mining Extension Service instructor for West Virginia University (WVU), traveling to mines across the state and teaching courses such as mining methods, ventilation, and safety to supervisors and miners.

Service as a tech sergeant during World War II meant that Bill did not receive his engineer of mines BS degree from WVU until 1949. His graduating class of miners, most of which were fellow veterans, would prove to be among the most distinguished group in the history of the program—and Bill was at the top of the class. In recognition of his standing, the industry’s Old Timers Club, a group of leading executives, presented him with its inaugural award. Bill later became the club’s president.

In the summers during his college years, Bill worked for Christopher Coal Company, a subsidiary of Consol, as a timberman and trackman—physically demanding jobs during those early days of mine mechanization. Upon graduation, he

elected to work for Christopher and was initially assigned to a laborer job at one of the company's four mines. He quickly rose to become construction foreman and belt foreman, then preparation engineer for the processing plant.

In 1952 he became production engineer for all of Christopher and accepted the assignment of mechanizing the mining operations by introducing continuous mining and continuous haulage. He extensively modified a new design of continuous miner—the boring-machine miner—and obtained several of his eventual total of 34 patents for improvements in mining equipment and the mining process.

He also developed and received a patent for the extensible belt, a continuous haulage unit that, together with the continuous miner, constituted a new mining system. This system became the mainstay of production for the thicker, Pittsburgh-seam mines for years to come, essentially until the introduction of longwall mining—which Bill also altered decades later.

In a talk aimed at young engineers, Bill said that his career had been driven by a firm belief that there was an opportunity for improvement in the science of coal mining. He noted that the industry was able to keep coal prices steady at \$5 per ton for the next 20+ years thanks to a series of engineering innovations.

Bill next took on the job of developing and then running the new Humphrey Mine, at the time the largest mine in West Virginia. He was promoted to general superintendent, in charge of production at all of Christopher's mines, and in 1961 moved into Consol's corporate structure as assistant to the vice president of operations. Consol was then the country's largest coal mining company and all engineering fell under the direction of the VP-Operations.

In 1965, in an event seldom witnessed in corporations, the VP-Operations began reporting to Bill when Bill was promoted to executive vice president of Consolidation Coal and a member of its board of directors, positions that he held until his retirement in 1982. The rumor that circulated through the corporate offices was that Bill's former boss was offered the job and replied that he was content in his current job but knew

the perfect person for the position: Bill. True or not, Bill proved to be the perfect person to lead the company through a period of rapid introduction of innovative technology. In his new position, Bill headed all of the company's service functions, including engineering, exploration, land, environmental services, long-range planning, mining research, and the design and construction of all new mining facilities.

In addition to the extensible belt and modifications to the boring-machine type miner, Bill either personally developed or led the development, design, and/or adoption of the rope-belt conveyor, belt-conveyor rigid-bracket idlers in underground mining, self-training belt idlers, bulk rock dusting, the pressure-vessel bulk rock duster, and many other innovations for which he received patents. He led a safety-inspired, multi-year effort to replace belt conveyors in underground mines with coarse-coal hydraulic haulage, developing and employing a prototype unit that operated for a number of years but ultimately did not succeed economically. He led the introduction of longwall mining at Consol, while developing innovations such as a testing protocol that forced manufacturers to make improvements in the machinery and system. These innovations dramatically improved safety and productivity at Consol and, ultimately, in the industry.

He also led and oversaw the company's degasification efforts, leading to the early application of intelligent directional drilling to coalbed methane drainage and, soon after, the formation of Consol's commercial gas company. He organized the company's Central Engineering group that would take over the development of Consol's major projects, including the ground-breaking (pun intended) developments in longwall mining.

Bill received many honors during his career, among them the Erskine Ramsay Award (1981) and Howard N. Eavenson Award (1984) from the American Institute of Mining, Metallurgical, and Petroleum Engineers (AIME), the Percy Nicholls Award (1979) of the American Society of Mechanical Engineers (ASME)-AIME, the William Metcalf Award (1984) of the Engineers' Society of Western Pennsylvania (ESWP),

and the Distinguished Service Award from the National Coal Association. He was a distinguished member of the Society for Mining, Metallurgy, and Exploration (SME) and an honorary member of the AIME. In 1981 he was awarded an honorary doctor of science degree from West Virginia University. He was inducted into the West Virginia Coal Miners Hall of Fame and posthumously elected to the National Mining Hall of Fame.

He served as an officer or director of numerous associations, including director of the Bituminous Coal Operators' Association, Western Pennsylvania Coal Operators' Association, and ESWP; president of the Coal Mining Institute of America, King Coal Club, and Old Timers Club; and chair of Bituminous Coal Research, Inc.

Bill remained active outside the coal industry both pre- and postretirement. He served on numerous national committees for governmental, National Academies, and industry-council studies concerning energy sufficiency, disposal of industrial waste, unconventional gas sources, air quality, alternative energy sources, ground control in mining, and acid rain. He was on the visiting committees for the WVU College of Mineral and Energy Resources and MIT's Mechanical Engineering Department. He served for many years on the boards of directors of Elgin National Industries and Standard Havens, Inc.

After 33 years of service, Bill retired from Consol in 1982 and, with his wife Doris Mae, moved to Florida, remaining active professionally, both as an advisor and a consultant, until shortly before his death.

Doris Mae and daughter Kathy predeceased him. He is survived by his second wife, Martha (Muff), sons William N. Poundstone Jr. and Scott L. Poundstone, and stepdaughter Beth Mathias, along with a number of grandchildren.

