

Don Hintz: Flying high, going nuclear

BY RICK MICHAL

HAD HIS EYESIGHT been a little bit better, Don Hintz might have retired from a career as a Navy pilot instead of a utility executive. Such are the fates, however, and aviation's loss led to the nuclear industry's gain.

Hintz, the 53rd president of the American Nuclear Society, seems to have been born for the nuclear industry, although he still holds a fondness for airplanes. It was Hintz who was an early proponent of the ongoing "renaissance," believing that nuclear plants could be financially competitive if operated at high performance levels. It was Hintz who pushed Entergy Corporation to acquire the Pilgrim plant at a time when the deregulation of the electricity market was thought to be the end of commercial nuclear power. And it is Hintz who relishes the opportunity to lead ANS, the organization that he feels should be embraced by the industry and seen by the public as a trusted authority on nuclear technology.

Hintz joined Entergy Corporation in 1989 and became its president a decade later. During his time there, he convinced Entergy's management and board of directors to adopt nuclear as a major growth strategy that transformed the company from a regional utility into a national fleet operator. As president, he was responsible for the company's 30 000 megawatts of generation assets, consisting of 10 nuclear plants, 73 gas/oil-fired plants, six coal-fired plants, and a portfolio of renewable power sources that included hydro, thermal, and wind generation. In addition, he oversaw nuclear plant decommissioning, license renewal, and 18 000 miles of transmission lines. Hintz retired from Entergy in 2004.

Although he no longer walks the hallways on a daily basis, he is still a welcome figure at Entergy Nuclear's Mississippi headquarters, where he visits as a member



Donald C. Hintz, 2007–2008 ANS president

Photos, front cover and this page by Pau Nehrenz

ANS's new president plans to knock on doors during his year in office to promote the Society as a vital contributor to the nuclear renaissance.

of Entergy's board of directors and chairman of the board's Nuclear Committee. Kelle Barfield, Entergy Nuclear's director of communications, relates that there has always been a connection between Hintz and his employees. "The employees saw his love for the business, so they knew he placed value on them getting it done right," she says. "They want to do a good job, but they want to know that management appreciates it. And he did."

Hintz, who has retained his youthful appearance into retirement, was able to instill confidence in employees by having an "open-door" managerial style, by being willing to do any job at a nuclear plant, and by convincing workers to make plans and then achieve them.

Hintz is a warm and friendly man with a sincere smile, although he seems a bit shy about talking about himself. He opens up,

however, when the word *nuclear* is mentioned. He forecasts a good future for the industry and is convinced that ANS can serve all of its members—at utilities, universities, laboratories, and government agencies, and in other areas.

Hintz hopes that his year of leading ANS will help bring the industry closer to a new generation of power reactors, and he seems up to the task, as his history proves. Here is his story.

Going nuclear

Born in 1943 in Wisconsin, Hintz proved a worthy son of "America's Dairyland." The Hintzes owned a dairy, and on those summer mornings when the regular deliverymen were on vacation, young Don Hintz was up and out of bed early to work the milk route. "All my early years were spent in Wisconsin, and I think it's an area where



Toddler Don Hintz enjoying a summer day in Wisconsin in the mid-1940s.

there was a good work ethic,” he says.

The Hintz family lived in the small, central Wisconsin town of Schofield, population 2500 at the time, next door to the city of Wausau, then population 30 000. Hintz remembers having a good childhood, which he describes as “typical” for the time. He had a younger sister, Judy, and he spent his summers outdoors, riding bikes or going on days-long camping trips as an Eagle Scout. In winters he engaged in cross-country skiing. Hintz also spent time at small airports to feed his passion for flying. “One of the things that I always wanted to do since I was a little boy was fly airplanes,” he says.

Tragedy entered his life at a young age. When he was in the third grade, he and his family were involved in a car accident in which his father was killed. In time, his mother, who is now in her 80s and doing well in Wisconsin, remarried. From that relationship Hintz’s half brother, Tom, was born.

Through high school, Hintz played organized sports—basketball and football—but those things seemed secondary to his desire to spend time on the water, either swimming, waterskiing, or boating, avocations to this day. “There were times in Wisconsin that I spent half my time on the water,” he says. “At my family’s cottage in northern Wisconsin, I would be on the water from the time the sun came up to the time it went down.”

High school is where he met Arlene Hack, who would one day become his wife. After graduating from high school, Hintz attended the University of Wisconsin, where he studied chemical engineering. By this time he had qualified for his airplane pilot’s license, and his goal was to become a flyer for the Navy. The way to do that was through the Naval Reserve Officers Training Corps, which would pay for his tuition

and books at the university and give him a monthly stipend. In return, he would serve as an officer in the U.S. Navy after graduation.

At the start of his third summer in the NROTC program his career aspirations changed, however, when he went for a flight physical. “I went to the Glenview Naval Air Station in Illinois for the physical and everything went fine, including the eye exam, until they dilated my eyes,” he says. Test results indicated that he was a bit nearsighted. There were plenty of applicants wanting to become Navy pilots, so his minor vision problem was enough to close the door on flight school.

That didn’t stop Hintz, who tried another approach. This time, he paid his own way to the Naval Air Station near Minneapolis to retake the flight physical. Sadly for Hintz, the results were the same. Reality set in for the 20-year-old: Because of his flawed vision, he would never become a Navy pilot.

Needing to find a new direction, Hintz went back to Wisconsin and sorted through his options. The Navy’s fastest growing career path at the time was in Adm. Hyman Rickover’s nuclear program. To be accepted into the program, an applicant had to go through an interview process that included a one-on-one with Rickover himself. “Rickover was, in stature, a small man,” Hintz recalls, “but the experience was a bit intimidating because he himself was intimidating.”

Before meeting with Rickover, Hintz was



High school portrait

interviewed by senior Navy officers. Finally, he was called in to meet with Rickover. Hintz is convinced that the decision on his acceptance into the program had already been made, short of the admiral’s stamp of approval. This meeting with the admiral was just another test, to determine whether the candidate was able to withstand pressure under fire.

“Everybody has a story about their meeting with Rickover because I think he tried



An early shot of the young Hintz and his sister Judy



Young cadet Hintz in his Navy blues

to see your reaction to being put into an uncomfortable spot,” Hintz says. He remembers that as he was about to enter Rickover’s office, an officer advised him to answer questions directly, not to beat around the bush, and not to waste the admiral’s time. Hintz had no more than entered the room when the admiral exploded with a shout, “Hintz, what are you, stupid or lazy?”

Hintz recalls now, with a slightly embarrassed chuckle, that he probably *did* beat around the bush after Rickover’s opening barrage. Hintz’s offense in the admiral’s eyes was that he had gotten an A in organic chemistry one semester and had dropped down to a B the next semester. “Academics were important to Rickover, and he was absolutely convinced that if you could do it in one semester, you could do it the next,” he says. Rickover’s verbal assault “was out of context,” Hintz adds, “but I suspect it was to see what my reaction would be.”

After the interview ended, Hintz was dismissed and told to wait in an adjoining room. There he sat for a few hours, perhaps to let him stew over his performance in front of the admiral, before an officer en-

tered the room and told him he had been accepted into the nuclear program. It was 1966 and Hintz was 22 years old.

That same year, he and Arlene were married in a ceremony in Wisconsin. He also graduated as a chemical engineer from the University of Wisconsin, received his commission in the Navy as an ensign, and started his nuclear career. The Navy’s program included 12 months of nuclear training, followed by six months in submarine school, and ultimately an assignment on a submarine. For about six years he served on submarines and enjoyed it, do-

ing everything from piloting the sub to operating its reactor. But the Navy at the time was building subs so quickly that he could never get shore duty. Had Hintz been assigned to a fast-attack sub, for example, he would be at sea 11 months out of the year.

It was enough to convince Hintz to get out of the water and back on land, so he resigned his Navy commission. He wasn’t sure if he would continue with nuclear as his vocation, and he was thinking about getting back into chemical engineering. But it was 1971, and the nuclear power industry was starting to boom as new construction got under way. There were lots of opportunities and better job offers. The Kewaunee plant, a 540-MWe pressurized water reactor, was being built in Wisconsin, so Hintz went back home and became a test engineer at the plant. In fact, the man who was in charge of all aspects of building Kewaunee—Carl Giesler, an ANS



The new plant manager, with the Kewaunee nuclear power plant in the background



The Hintzes in Hawaii in 1986

member at the time—just so happened to be a former customer on the Hintz dairy’s milk route.

Hintz credits Giesler with keeping Kewaunee’s construction and startup program fiscally on track. “I learned a lot from him,” he says. “The fact that such a small organization would take on such a big project was astounding. And Carl’s managing such a big project with such a small organization has really stuck with me.”

A short time later, Hintz was put in charge of the site when Giesler was promoted within Wisconsin Public Service, the company that owned and operated Kewaunee. “I was plant manager at Kewaunee during the time of the accident at Three Mile Island in 1979, which changed everything,” Hintz says. “We had a very small staff at Kewaunee; our whole nuclear organization, including corporate, was only 116 people. Post-TMI, plant staffing drastically changed throughout the industry. I was involved at Kewaunee with all the regulatory changes that happened in the industry as a result of TMI. It was tough time, but it was a pretty exciting time, too.”

Hintz’s management style as plant manager was to go out and rub elbows with the workers. During refueling outages, for example, he would find out what the most difficult job was and then he would try to observe that particular job for a day. “Some guy in containment,” Hintz says, “would be working in plastics [anticontamination clothing], and he’d be dehydrated and sweating. I’d suit up and go into containment with him. There was no way I could help the guy do his job, because I didn’t actually know how to do it, but I think there was a true appreciation on his part because

he knew that I knew his contributions to the nuclear plant.”

Hintz was employed at Wisconsin Public Service until 1989. By that time, he had climbed the ladder to become the company’s senior vice president in charge of all forms of electricity generation. Much of his business success he credits to his Navy training and to mentors such as Giesler. “I believe that most of these businesses are really people businesses,” he says. “If you take care of the people and get the right people in the right jobs, the technical parts take care of themselves, including in nuclear. I think I was fortunate to have good mentors along the way in the Navy and elsewhere who allowed me to capitalize on my interest in people.”

Enter Entergy

In 1989, Hintz headed south to Jackson, Miss., to become Entergy Nuclear’s chief operating officer. A year later, the company created Entergy Operations, which pioneered the concept of a nuclear management company. Hintz, who was put in charge of the new company, credits former Entergy Nuclear head Bill Cavanaugh with coming up with the idea. Under this arrangement, the ownership of the plant would remain the same—for example, Arkansas Power & Light (now Entergy subsidiary Entergy Arkansas Inc.) would retain ownership of the Arkansas Nuclear One (ANO) plant—but Entergy Operations would operate it.

Right away the new management company had its hands full. Grand Gulf, a relatively new plant in Mississippi, was doing fine operationally, but its costs were rising out of control. The Waterford-3 plant, a new reactor in Louisiana, was mired in average performance in operations and economics. And at ANO, consistently poor regulatory performance was driving it toward near-certain shutdown. Hintz found that each plant was in its own unique situation. At ANO, for example, the staff was top notch, but the materiel condition of the plant had suffered because of insufficient funding. At River Bend, another new plant in Louisiana, large amounts of money had been pumped into the plant, but because the owner was struggling financially, salary freezes for employees were in effect, which led to morale problems and a large turnover of personnel.

The various issues led Hintz to create a five-year plan to bring all the plants up to the industry’s top quartile. Regular meetings were held with employees to measure progress and improve on areas that had fallen behind. Upon introduction of the plan, Hintz remembers that a lot of employees would say, “Do you want good regula-



The Hintzes at one of the plants they visited on an overseas trip, which also included a visit to the Chernobyl plant

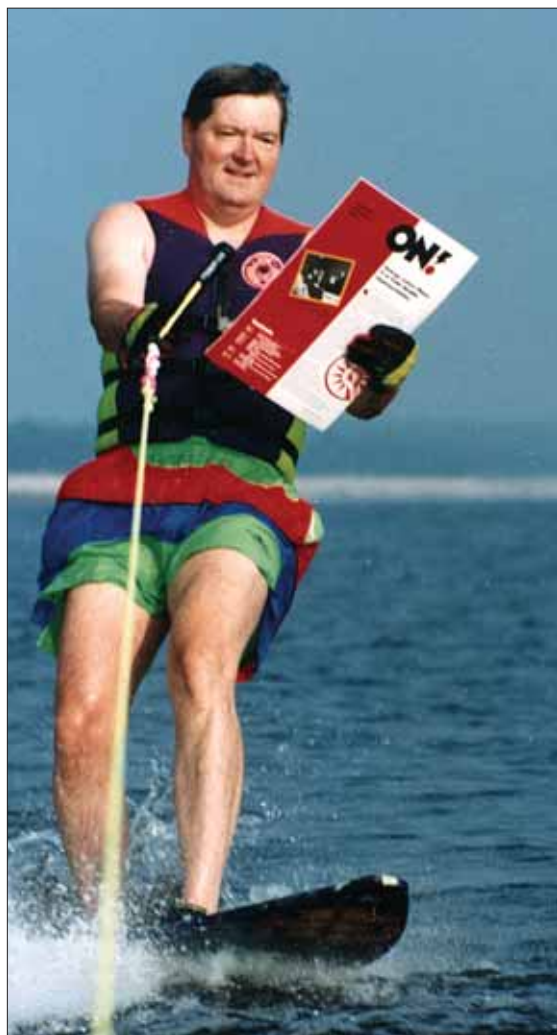
tory performance, or do you want cost performance? You can't have both." But Hintz insisted that the two measures could go hand in hand if the plan were followed. Within five years, all of Entergy's plants entered the top quartile.

Hintz also was the main driver of Entergy's acquisition of the Pilgrim plant, in Massachusetts, which turned out to be the first out-of-service-area reactor purchased through a competitive bidding process. The time frame was the mid-1990s, when the deregulation of the electricity industry was creeping across the nation. "Everybody was questioning the economics of nuclear in a nonregulated environment," he says. But Hintz wanted to see if nuclear plants could be competitive in what he terms "a brutally competitive market."

Hintz led his staff in compiling a study that analyzed whether Entergy's nuclear plants could survive. The quick answer was yes. If the plants were operated at high capacity factors and with controlled costs,



Getting ready to race in the Birkebeiner, a cross-country skiing trip that traverses 33 hilly miles in Wisconsin.



The waterskiing Hintz enjoys reading a copy of an Entergy in-house publication. The joke is that Entergy employees were challenged with sending in photos of themselves and the publication in exotic locations, and Hintz thought, "What better place for some good reading than out on the water?"

they would not just survive, but thrive. He still had to convince Entergy's management and board of directors that even poor-performing plants could be turned around. If Hintz turned out to be wrong about being able to make Pilgrim profitable and the plant had to be closed, the company would be out only the cost of its purchase—\$81 million—because Pilgrim's decommissioning costs were part of the deal. The board was convinced, and in 1999 Entergy bought the Pilgrim plant, thanks to Hintz's foresight and follow-through.

By 2004, Entergy had bought four more reactors. Entergy Nuclear is now the nation's second largest nuclear operator behind Exelon Generation, and in 2006 it contributed 27 percent of Entergy's net income. "All of these different things throughout Don's career show how good he is at identifying the potential for nuclear in a positive way and then making it happen," Barfield says.

Active retirement

Since he retired in 2004, Hintz hasn't been one to sit around. He still flies airplanes and still spends time steering boats across the water. Since his childhood days when he peddled across Wisconsin terrain on his bike, he has remained an avid cyclist. Recently he joined a small group of utility executives on a seven-day bicycle ex-

cursion through the foothills of the French Alps. He also used to participate in 100-mile-a-day bike rides and mini-triathlons (swim, bike, run), but his pursuit of those activities has slowed these days. In addition, he has taken a break since his last participation in a cross-country ski race in Wisconsin called the Birkebeiner, which traverses 33 miles of hilly terrain in the middle of winter.

Nowadays, Hintz enjoys adventurous vacations, and he and Arlene have taken trips to India, China, and Alaska. They have rented a boat and taken it down the canals of France and have traveled the Colorado River by raft through the Grand Canyon. Hintz acknowledges with a wink that he knows the best time to go to Disney World, when the crowds are small and the lines for rides are short.

After he retired, Hintz was elected to the board of directors for Entergy Corporation and for Ontario Power Generation. He also chairs the Nuclear Electric Insurance Limited's International Technical Advisory Committee and serves on the Electric Power Research Institute's board of directors. He remains a member of an advisory board at the University of Wisconsin.

Hintz previously served as chairman of the Nuclear Energy Institute, was director of the board of the Institute of Nuclear Power Operations, was on the Accrediting Board of the National Academy for Nuclear Training, and is a former director of both the Southeastern Electric Exchange and Nuclear Electric Insurance Limited.

Hintz is a graduate of the Utility Executive Program at the University of Michigan and the Advanced Management Program at Harvard Business School. Earlier this summer, NEI awarded Hintz the William S. Lee Award for industry leadership. He received ANS's Utility Leadership Award in 1995,



Hintz awaits the start of a 100-mile bike ride.



Don and Arlene in Russia

and the ANS Future Vision Award in 2004. Also in 2004, he received the Platts Global Energy Lifetime Achievement Award for his long and varied career of service, his creativity and insight, and his contributions to the development and future of the energy industry.

Hintz considers himself fortunate to have been given the chance to continue his involvement with Entergy and its employees by serving on Entergy's board of directors and chairing the board's Nuclear Committee. "I retired because I wanted some flexibility," he says. "But Entergy has been like family to me. It would have been very difficult for me to just walk away, which I would have had to do if I didn't have the opportunity to go on the Entergy board. That has really helped me through this transition. I'm still involved, yet I can have some of the flexibility that I wanted when I decided to retire."

Summers are now spent in Mississippi and winters in Florida, but since he retired the Hintzes have lived through two hurricanes and six tropical storms. They are considering moving back to Wisconsin for the summers, somewhere on the water, of course.

Going forward

Hintz is excited by the prospect of leading ANS as the nuclear renaissance is under way. "It is really an exciting time in nuclear," he says. "I wish I were 20 years younger. I went through the bad times in nuclear, and I think we're about ready to go through the good times."

His pronouncements about events that will affect the near future are insightful: He thinks that nuclear now enjoys good public support because of the exceptional safety record of existing reactors, as well as environmental issues and concerns about global warming. He would like to see the enactment of the provisions in the 2005 Energy Bill, including loan guarantees for new nuclear plants. He wishes that vendors were further along on new plant designs so that utilities could get a better handle on costs. He points out that state and local governments, at least in certain areas, are eager to host the new plants. He is confident that the lack of a geologic repository will not stall the renaissance. He thinks that utilities would start new construction right now if the new-plant designers and the government had their pieces of the puzzle in place. And he is certain that the stars are aligning

for the construction of a new fleet.

As events move forward, Hintz thinks that it is especially important for the nuclear community—utilities, academia, govern-



At the helm of a sailboat

ment, waste management, medical, etc.—to come together as a credible force behind new plants, because utilities acting alone may be seen as self-serving. This is where ANS comes in, according to Hintz. He feels that ANS can serve as the authoritative voice of the renaissance, just as it does for all nuclear technologies.

Hintz will be knocking on doors during his year as ANS president trying to get greater utility participation in the Society. He explains that after the current fleet of plants was built, utilities were drawn to other organizations that were considered more focused on utilities' interests. Utilities saw ANS as representing nuclear science and technology in general, rather than focusing on nuclear power. The utilities have reached the point where ANS is still respected but is not seen as vital to the renaissance. Hintz thinks this perception needs to change. He plans to meet with chief nuclear officers to urge their financial support for employees to become ANS members, attend meetings, join committees, and become active in the Society's standards efforts.

While Hintz admits that he is utility-focused, he sees no conflict between the nuclear power side and the other areas of the technology. Rather, a healthy commercial



A pilot for most of his life, Hintz stands by the Beechcraft Bonanza that he had just picked up from the factory in 1997.

nuclear industry is good for everybody. "Look how many universities closed their nuclear programs because we weren't building any nuclear plants," he says. "Surely it is in the best interest of the universities and the government nuclear facilities that we get back to building reactors

again. We're all in this together. There shouldn't be any competition among us."

As the renaissance continues, Hintz hopes to bring together all nuclear professionals to help ANS fly to new heights, which, as the veteran pilot that he is, would suit him just fine. **NN**



A recent trip took the Hintzes to New Zealand