



Southern Minnesota Section Newsletter

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A knack for solving problems

Retired IBM worker has 79 patents credited to his name

by Matthew Stolle – Copyright 2001, Post-Bulletin Co.

A notebook and pen rest on a night stand next to Hal Ottesen's bed, within easy arm's reach when the next creative burst strikes. And there's no telling when that could happen next.

Greta, his wife of 39 years, has known her husband to awaken in the middle of the night and quietly exclaim, "This is what I wanted," while jotting down his thoughts. Sleeping or dreaming, showering or driving -- the ideas bubble forth like from a boiling pot.

Tirelessly pondering problems in advanced technology and computer disc drive systems, Ottesen, 64, has 79 patents credited to his name. Thirty more applications are under consideration.

Ottesen credits an usually productive partnership with an IBM employee, Gordon Smith, in developing the abundance of novel ideas and patents that are attached to his name.

The majority have come since his retirement in 1994 as an employee of IBM for 32 years. Retirement, he says in a thick Norwegian accent, freed him from the distractions of company politics and provided the "peace of mind" to focus over long periods of time.

Active mind As a professor of electrical and computer engineering at the University of Minnesota-Rochester, Ottesen said teaching also helps keep the mind active. Ottesen teaches courses in "Fuzzy Logic," "Calculus" and "Image Processing" for the school. For the past 10 years, he also has been an adjunct professor at the Mayo Clinic Graduate School, where in 1999 he was named "Teacher of the Year."

"Teaching is twice learned," he says. "If you are going to teach a subject, you don't want to embarrass yourself. You are going to learn it well and understand it."

The titles for these patents aren't the kind that easily trip off the tongue. An example of one such patent reads: "Bias Servo Look for Magneto-Resistive Read/Write Head."

Ottesen has a simpler explanation: his work is aimed at making disc drives, repositories of vast amounts of information, more robust, reliable and better performing, he said.

Ottesen hasn't gotten rich off these patents, all of which are owned by IBM. Nor does that fact seem to bother him. He revels in the joy of discovery.

Ottesen was born in Norway in 1937. He went to a public elementary school that was also attended by then-Crown Prince Harald, later King of Norway. It would be the setting for one of the more memorable incidents in Ottesen's life -- a story that would be told repeatedly over the years.

It was wintertime and Ottesen was outside playing when a snowball struck him in the face. Turning, he found that his assailant was none other than the Crown Prince. Ottesen ran at the prince, knocking him down, and proceeded to dunk his head unceremoniously in the snow. The incident ended when a royal guard fiercely admonished Ottesen never to do that again, according to Greta.

True calling Early on, Ottesen discovered a knack for solving problems. He found his true calling in the fields of engineering and electronics when the Soviet Union sent Sputnik into orbit in the mid-1950s. He later transferred to the University of Colorado, where he earned his bachelor's, master's and doctorate degrees in electrical engineering.

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IEEE Section Meeting

Brian Nass, XIOtech

The Storage Industry – From the Trenches

Monday, January 14, 6:30 pm
Mayo Medical Sciences Building
(321 3rd Avenue SW, Rochester)

Pizza & socializing at 6:30 pm

Brian will provide a "from the trenches" analysis of the storage industry, present and future, including the perspectives of customers, suppliers, and investors. Emerging technologies are creating new distributed storage configurations that offer advantages to customers. Brian will provide an overview of these new technologies. He will discuss potential disruptive technologies, where these inventions are coming from, and what impacts they may have on how enterprises think about disaster recovery, data protection, storage networking, and storage management in general.

Brian Nass has master's degrees in Mechanical and Industrial Engineering from Stanford University. He earned his BSEE at Iowa State University

After joining IBM Rochester in 1981 he held a variety of technical and management assignments in IBM's disk drive, notebook and AS/400 businesses. Moving to Western Digital in Rochester in 1997, he was made responsible for management of manufacturing engineering and for the introduction of new products into the factory in Singapore. He became the VP of Marketing for the WD's Enterprise Storage division by 1998, and then site manager and VP of Marketing for the entire company by 1999.

Following the Western Digital shutdown in early 2000, Brian assembled a team of 15 former WD engineers and programmers to focus on a new generation of storage systems for Seagate Technology. In March 2001 his Rochester engineering team was moved into XIOtech, a wholly-owned Seagate subsidiary. XIOtech is headquartered in Eden Prairie, Minnesota. It is a leading developer and manufacturer of networked storage products. Brian serves as XIOtech's CTO.

Brian serves the Rochester community through his involvement on the US Bank Advisory board, the Greater Rochester Area University Center board, the United Way of Olmsted County Board, and several youth mentoring projects. He is married with 3 children, and he enjoys backpacking and music when he has any spare time.

Volunteers Needed for Regional Science Fair

Preparations have begun for the Rochester Regional Science Fair. Our section has helped in previous years to locate judges. More than 200 judges are needed this year. Any help would be fantastic. The Fair will be held on Thursday and Friday, March 7-8. On March 7, help is needed for judging papers (3-6 PM) and for judging both papers and projects (6-9 PM). Project judges are needed on March 8 (8-11 AM and 12-3 PM). Meals and snacks will be provided.

Please contact Karen Sabatke at ksabatke@aol.com or kasabatke@rochester.k12.mn.us with the times that you are available. Thanks for your help!



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Meeting Announcements by Email

Already we send email announcements of our meetings to several hundred people (section members and others). We would like to expand this service by offering it to all of our membership. Eventually email service might replace the hardcopy newsletter.

In the near future we hope to develop a tool on our website where you may register or update your email address. *If you have html programming skills and would like to volunteer your time to help us implement this tool, please contact Bill Gorder.*

If you have any objections to receiving meeting announcements by email, please contact any board member.

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