Hans Burgers Award for Outstanding Contribution to Healthcare Engineering  Phil Langford

By Matthew Bradford

CHES's Hans Burgers Award was established in 2004 to honour those who have contributed greatly to Canada's healthcare sector and left an indelible mark on the industry and its community as a whole. It came as no surprise to Phil Langford's friends and colleagues, then, when the industry veteran and longtime CHES supporter was called on stage to accept this year's award during CHES's 2013 National Conference in Niagara Falls.

“Phil's award was well deserved,” affirms Per Paasche with CHES's Maritime Chapter Executive, and one of the many CHES members who have worked alongside Langford. “He has done a lot for the Maritime Chapter and has been a great asset to the national organization.”

Langford's career began in 1974, when he graduated with a Bachelor of Science (applied Physics and Math) from Dalhousie University and a Bachelor of Engineering with distinction (Electrical) in 1976 from the Nova Scotia Technical College. Soon after, he joined with Calgary Power, returning later to take up a role with Nova Scotia Power. Following this, he joined Nation Sea Products (NSP), where he rose through the ranks to become general manager of the company's engineering division. It was here where he first made an impression on Sam Elsworth, who would go on to become one of Langford's closest friends and colleagues.

“Phil was a young electrical engineer when I first met him. We were doing a major design for fish plants being built all around Eastern Canada, and one of our senior electrical engineer from our consulting practice had to retire, so I had to rely very heavily on this young guy to see us through a very big projects,” recalls Elsworth, who today serves as the project manager for South Shore District Health Authority. “Phil would come down occasionally to do electrical inspections and upgrades just to see us through the rough spots in the various jobs, and we got to be pretty good friends over that period of time.”

That friendship continued when Langford left NSP to form his own computer training company for seniors and children; and later when he accepted a job to build and staff a seaweed extraction plant for Acadian Sea Products. From there, he was recruited to join Western Health Region (formerly Western Region of Nova Scotia) as its facilities and planning director for eleven hospitals throughout the region. Here, he helped guide the region through a period of transformation back to districts, even stepping in as the administrative lead for the newly formed South Shore Health District during its search for a permanent CEO. Upon the completion of the transition, he accepted the position of vice president of operations, a position he held until his retirement in 2010.

As an integral part of the region's healthcare strategy, Langford amassed a list of achievements throughout his years. In addition to playing a lead role in the disaster planning, he was instrumental in developing an ongoing IAQ renovation project for the former region and district, which saw the
facilities upgraded to meet and exceed modern healthcare requirements.

“Phil’s foresight and leading edge attitude has provided the District with many new initiatives, including integrating and promoting wireless technology,” says Robert Barss, Manager of Facility Services for the South Shore District Health Authority.

In addition, Langford played a critical role in championing a Master Plan Program for the district's hospitals, and took a leadership role in other initiatives such as the Primary Health Care development, Isolation Room Study, Women's and Children's Wellness Centre, Centre for Restorative Care, and other initiatives before retiring.

“Philip has the strongest work ethic of anyone I know,” affirms Elsworth. “If there was a job to be done, he was brutally task oriented and he was always cool and collected as he did it. There was no stopping him; if there was a job to do, he was going to get it done come hell or high water.”

Barss is another longtime colleague and friend of Langford. Looking back on Langford's dedication to the industry and its people, he notes, “Phil is extremely intelligent and is very quick to fully understand and communicate new concepts. His commitment is unbiased and his dedication unending.”

That work ethic and commitment to those around him has also carried over to Langford's work with CHES, which he joined in 1999 and continues to be an active member with today. Here, alongside the Maritime Chapter's team, he has adopted many roles including that of national secretary, on various CHES sub-committees both national and chapter related and, more recently, as interim chair during an unforeseen transitional period.

“He's very conscientious and a good worker,” insists Paasche. “When we had a problem here a year and a half ago with a vacant presidency seat, Phil stepped right in and took over as acting president. He was very progressive, he got things going, and he was dedicated to improving the membership. He really took complete control.”

In his capacity with CHES, Langford has worn many hats, including chair of the Maritime Chapter, and as an advocate for the chapter's numerous initiatives. Langford has also been a part of CHES's Atlantic Phil and maintenance staff employee Randall Harnish celebrate CHES's National Healthcare Facilities & Engineering Week. Executive since 2003, and served on CHES's National Board of Directors, as well as on its Communication and Canadian Healthcare Standards committees.

“There are a lot of very dedicated people in CHES,” says Langford, reflecting on his tenure with the association. “I can't say enough about the people who commit themselves to be members, particularly those who take an active involvement in their chapter or in any of the sub committees the chapters may have or with the national organization. If it weren’t for them, CHES would not have progressed as far as it has in recent years.”
Today, Langford continues to contribute greatly to CHES at the chapter and national level. His efforts have led to the development of new by-laws for the chapter, and updates for those of the national executive. Among his many initiatives include establishing partnerships with industry organizations, and continuing to work with the Canadian Standards Association, in which he has contributed greatly to its technical committee for CSA 257, Health Care Facility Engineering and Physical Plant, and its various sub-committees, including development of the Z8000, Design and Construction of Healthcare Facilities and Z8002, Maintenance and Operations of Healthcare Facilities. In addition, he is working to establish a CHES Associate Member Advisory Council with the purpose of guiding the executive council as it evolves into the years to come.

Reflecting on his contributions to CHES, Elsworth says, “He's an extremely ethical individual, and he really takes the oath very seriously. Once he signs onto something like CHES you can count on him to bring something to the table.”

“Phil has been an ardent supporter of CHES at both the local and national level,” adds Barss.

Outside of CHES, Langford has been involved and taken an active leadership role in many community organizations. Among them include his role as a Boy Scout leader, member of the South Shore Regional School Board, president of the Riverport Community Centre, chair of the Riverport Board of Trade, president of the local Red Cross organization, a coach for community basketball and soccer teams, and a fundraiser for numerous non-profit initiatives.

“As with any task, Phil shows unbiased commitment to his family, his community and the healthcare industry and the people it serves. He is a well-respected leader and administrator who is a supportive mentor and a team player who is deserving of this award,” says CHES.

All totalled, Barss says Langford's nomination was a natural conclusion for both him and the many colleagues he's inspired throughout his career. “I have known Phil most of my life, both as a friend and colleague; and I have worked with Phil in several capacities in both healthcare and private industry. Phil has encouraged my professional development and has always been a strong supporter of my career and goals. He is understanding, compassionate and maintains a calm disposition in times of crisis. Family and friends are important to Phil. If you need him, he will be there.”

As for his part, Langford is proud of his award, but says he is but one of many worthy candidates in the field he has called home for the last few decades.“AllIcansayisIamvery humbled. It nice to know that your peers recognize you; it's a great honour. The award is humbling and rewarding but I also look at the many many people out there across the country that could have also just as well received the award,” he adds.