



## The Order of the Engineer

By Jon A. Schmidt, P.E., SECB

The Order of the Engineer was established at Cleveland State University in 1970. It is largely based on a Canadian practice known as The Ritual of the Calling of an Engineer, which had its origins in 1922 when seven past presidents of the Engineering Institute of Canada attended a meeting in Montreal. They agreed with one of the speakers, Professor Herbert Haultain of the University of Toronto, that an organization was needed to unite all members of the engineering profession in Canada, and that it should promote a new statement of ethics to which all graduates could subscribe. Haultain contacted Rudyard Kipling, who created the Ritual and its central element, the Obligation of an Engineer.

Both the Order in the United States and the Ritual in Canada involve a Ring Ceremony at which each participant formally accepts the Obligation and receives a ring that is to be worn on the little finger of the working hand. The ring identifies the individual as an engineer and serves as a constant reminder of his or her commitment. In Canada, traditionally the ceremony is secret and the ring is iron; here the ceremony is public and the ring is stainless steel. The version of the Obligation used by the Order (see sidebar) is derived from Kipling's text, along with the Engineer's Creed of NSPE and the Canon of the Engineers' Council for Professional Development (ECPD, now ABET). The Obligation is intended to serve essentially the same function for engineers that the Hippocratic Oath does for physicians.

Of course, various other engineering-related bodies have promulgated their own codes of ethics. In fact, NCSEA currently has a committee developing one and presented the preliminary draft at a forum held in conjunction with the 15th Annual Conference in Philadelphia last October. The starting point is the ASCE Code of Ethics, but NCSEA is in the process of adjusting the language so that it applies specifically to structural engineers.

This highlights one of the obvious ways in which engineering is different from other professions – the proliferation of associations purporting to represent it. Lawyers have the ABA, doctors have the AMA, and architects have the AIA, but engineers have a whole alphabet

soup in addition to the aforementioned NSPE – ASCE, ASHRAE, ASME, IEEE, and many others. Even within our specific discipline, structural engineers must look to three separate organizations – NCSEA, CASE, and SEI – each of which focuses only on certain issues. There are good reasons for all of this, but it hampers our ability to speak with one voice.

The Order of the Engineer is not a membership society *per se*. It holds no meetings and collects no dues, although there is a modest one-time induction fee that includes the cost of the ring. It is overseen by a National Board of Governors that establishes policy and char-

ters local Links, granting them the right to conduct Ring Ceremonies, but nothing more. This seems like a great way to bind all engineers together based on what we have in common without creating a self-sustaining bureaucracy that gravitates toward the pursuit of narrow interests, rather than the broader good.

Just last month, I personally had the opportunity to participate in a Ring Ceremony at the University of Missouri-Kansas City. If you have a Link in your area, I encourage you to join the Order, accept the Obligation, and begin wearing the ring proudly.■

### The Obligation of the Engineer

*I am an Engineer, in my profession I take deep pride. To it I owe solemn obligations. Since the Stone Age, human progress has been spurred by the engineering genius. Engineers have made usable Nature's vast resources of material and energy for Humanity's benefit. Engineers have vitalized and turned to practical use the principles of science and the means of technology. Were it not for this heritage of accumulated experience, my efforts would be feeble.*

*As an Engineer, I pledge to practice integrity and fair dealing, tolerance and respect, and to uphold devotion to the standards and the dignity of my profession, conscious always that my skill carries with it the obligation to serve humanity by making the best use of Earth's precious wealth.*

*As an Engineer I shall participate in none but honest enterprises. When needed, my skill and knowledge shall be given without reservation for the public good. In the performance of duty and in fidelity to my profession, I shall give the utmost.*

**Acknowledgement:** The opinions expressed in this column are those of the author, but portions of the text have been adapted from content posted on the websites of The Order of the Engineer ([www.order-of-the-engineer.org](http://www.order-of-the-engineer.org)) and The Ritual of the Calling of an Engineer ([www.ironring.ca](http://www.ironring.ca)). Additional information is available from these sources.

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