



Q+A

## Neil Skoog

Profile Data: Neil Skoog is project developer for ERHCO, INC. In addition to developing new projects for the company, his duties include providing technical support for OEM customers and distributors that need qualified fluid power designers. The technical support varies from designing the hydraulic systems of new machines to troubleshooting and updating existing equipment, even writing service instructions if requested. He is also an IFPS Accredited Instructor.

**Q: When and where did your career in the fluid power industry start?**

**A:** I started in the fluid power industry in 1975 as a mechanic for a hydraulic and truck repair shop in northern Minnesota. The owner noticed my interest in fluid power and recommended that I attend a technical school to learn more about it. Unfortunately for him, I took his advice and after graduating from Granite Falls AVTI, the number of available opportunities led me away from returning to the repair shop. I have been involved in fluid power in some way ever since then. I am fortunate to have had the opportunity to be involved in all phases of fluid power.

**Q: What is the most memorable moment in your fluid power career? What did it teach you?**

**A:** The first one that comes to mind was the successful completion of an acceptance test for the Department of Energy. I was involved in this project from the beginning. It was for a winch package at the nuclear test site in Mercury, Nevada. Seeing the winch pull the test fixture across the desert, exceeding the requirements to the amazement of the customers was very satisfying, in addition to completing the volumes of documentation required. What I learned from this was to "stick with it" regardless of the setbacks due to delivery problems, design limitations, personality conflicts, and every other obstacle that arises.

**Q: What do you feel is the most important achievement in the fluid power industry?**

**A:** The most important achievement

to date is leak prevention, although it is still an ongoing problem. The amount of money wasted on fluid power leaks, both hydraulic and pneumatic, is significant. Additionally, work being done to replace traditional petroleum-based fluids with more environmentally acceptable fluids is very positive. These two combined will help to eliminate the stigma of hydraulics as a hot, oily, messy method of transmitting power.

**Q: How and why did you get involved in the IFPS?**

**A:** I got involved in the IFPS when I was asked by Greg Gordon to join a subcommittee many years ago. My reason for accepting the offer was for certification and education. After a couple of years, I left due to the time conflicts of work and family. Once my children were grown and I had more time, I again got involved in the IFPS.

**Q: Why do you feel the IFPS is important? Why would you encourage industry professionals to join?**

**A:** The IFPS provides a valuable service to the fluid power industry. As a non-profit organization of individuals, we can work outside the usual bounds of competing companies. Our certification tests are proof that we strive to eliminate any manufacturer- or brand-specific questions. The certification tests also indicate the work we have gone through to qualify true professionals in the fluid power industry. Our efforts to improve the knowledge and abilities of fluid power professionals extend beyond the interests of any particular employer. I encourage others to join the IFPS because it will improve them and the IFPS. The opportunity to meet other professionals in a non-competitive environment enables us to set aside artificial barriers and work toward improving our profession.

**Q: What have you personally gained by being a part of IFPS? How has it helped your career?**

**A:** Being an active member of the IFPS has helped my career and my profession. As a result of meeting the diverse people in the industry, I have gotten insight into the broad scope of fluid power. Too many times we get lost in our own little forest and don't see what a diverse profession we are a part of. The IFPS meetings have given me the opportunity to meet people with specialties that I would probably not interact with on a daily basis. These people are very willing to share their knowledge when I encounter something I have not experienced before. Working with these people has also shown me that sharing knowledge and experience strengthens a person's abilities. Those who want to keep their knowledge a secret usually end up getting left behind.

**Q: Where do you see the fluid power industry heading in the next 10 years?**

**A:** I believe that our best achievements are yet to come. Currently there are several ongoing efforts to improve the efficiency of fluid power systems. The industry is involved in the renewable resource effort in many different fronts. In wind energy, failure-prone gearboxes are being replaced with hydrostatic drive systems. Hydraulic hybrids have proven to be more versatile than electric hybrids in larger vehicles. We are currently working with a company that converts waste heat energy to hydraulic power. Although we have lost traditional applications in the industrial sector, the mobile sector is still increasing. Now that several well-known national colleges are involved in improving the ability to transmit hydraulic power, perhaps more young people will choose fluid power as a profession, rather than stumbling into it as has often happened in the past.