

Neil Harper, Theta Deut of Theta Delta Chi, '59

This is a brief biography Neil made available, through his classmate, Fred Wan, to MIT News in August, 2022.

"Anne Yost (Wellesley '58) and I were married shortly after my Tech graduation, in Hopkinsville, KY, on Sept. 8, 1959. Three days after the wedding, we sailed for Europe, where I took up an MIT/ETH Exchange Fellowship in Zurich. After an idyllic year in Switzerland and travels throughout Europe, we returned to the States, where I did my MS and PhD in structural engineering at the University of Illinois in Champaign, IL, finishing both degrees in three years.

In 1963, I took up a National Science Foundation postdoctoral fellowship for the study of shell structures (like Kresge Auditorium). This took us to Germany (Hannover) and the Netherlands (Delft) for study and research at the technical universities there. We returned to Chicago in the fall of 1964, where I became an associate partner at the architectural/engineering firm of Skidmore, Owings and Merrill (SOM).

While there, I founded their computer department, worked on some of their biggest building projects, and did the first structural analyses of the 100-story Hancock Building on North Michigan Avenue in Chicago and the Kitt Peak National Observatory in Arizona, using the structural design language (STRUDEL) that I helped develop during a sabbatical at MIT in 1966.

After four years at SOM, I returned to Cambridge in 1969 to start up a software company with the chairman of the MIT civil engineering department to bring nascent research in computers into engineering practice. After four years, I left and set up my own company, Harper and Shuman, in 1973, whose mission was to help architects and engineers manage their businesses more effectively. The software we developed was based, in part, on the manual double-entry bookkeeping system that Professor Zenon Zannetos of the Sloan School set up for our fraternity and taught me how to use when I was fraternity treasurer in 1957. That software remains the dominant software in the field, and I'm told it provides employment for about 200 people and currently serves over 10,000 architectural firms throughout the U.S. and some foreign countries.

I retired in 1986 at age 48 and devoted the last third of my life to volunteer work with nonprofits. I was a founder and served 10 years as initial chair of the United Methodist Foundation for New England, which now manages over \$125 million of endowment funds for the church. I was board treasurer and head of finance and investment for 20 years for the Boston Architectural College (BAC) in Boston, which has a cooperative work-study curriculum that consistently puts the BAC at the very top of architectural schools in the country.

I am finishing up nearly a quarter-century of service for a continuing care retirement center in the Boston area, where I served as treasurer and helped build the endowment from less than \$5 million to over \$75 million. There have been leadership positions in other community activities, like the local PTA, a regional mental health board, and a local music school. I am now finishing 50 years on the board (and 25th year as chairman) of the small, family-owned Hopkinsville Milling Company now run by our son, the fifth generation family president of the mill.

During my 36 years of retirement, we have also hiked and traveled extensively, including a monthlong high-altitude (15,000 to 18,000 feet) trek in the Mount Everest region, and other trips/treks in Tibet, Mongolia, Patagonia, New Zealand, Australia, Africa, portions of the Appalachian Trail, Canadian and

American Rockies, Swiss Alps, and Yorkshire, England. We continue to be blessed with good health, a wonderful son and daughter, and four grandchildren, for all of which we are truly thankful."