



Michael L. Scott

Many industrial arts, technology education, and now technology and engineering education leaders have made their mark on our profession. Their legacy is something that members of the profession enjoy and have the responsibility to continue to build upon.

This is the 21st in a series of articles entitled *The Legacy Project*, which focus on the lives and actions of leaders who have forged our profession into what it is today. This article will focus on Dr. Mike Scott. The following set of questions and their answers were created in an attempt to recall some of the many contributions made by Dr. Michael Scott during his career as an educator, supervisor/administrator, and professor at Ohio State before his unexpected death in 2004. The responses were provided by his associate, Dr. James LaPorte, from his perspective as a close, personal friend and professional colleague, and Patricia Stedman-LaPorte, a life-long friend of Mike's who grew up and went to school with him in The Bottoms, starting in the first grade. This is certainly an interesting approach to capture Dr. Scott's legacy and could only be accomplished by very close friends.

by
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Place of Birth: Columbus, Ohio

Degrees:

- B.S., Ohio State University
- M.S., Ohio State University
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How did you become interested in a career as a technology teacher?

I grew up in Columbus, Ohio in the original namesake of the city called Franklinton. That neighborhood was west of the Scioto river, across from the main downtown area. Because of its tendency to flood regularly, the area became known as “The Bottoms.” As a result, property there was much less expensive, thereby attracting lower income, working-class families.

I was second in birth order among three brothers and two sisters. My father was a hands-on sort of guy who had an amazing knack for fixing things. Lots of people would come to him with an automobile that mechanics said was not worth repairing. Somehow, he would not only get them running, but running well—relieving the stress of how they could get to and from work. His real goal, though, was not just about fixing things, but helping people in need.

Because of my Dad's knowledge and skill, there was always a bunch of young people hanging around our house working on their cars and such. Though I learned a lot about cars, I also learned a lot about people from these experiences. Perhaps most important, I learned about the intrinsic reward that comes from being of service to others. Moreover, Dad loved to talk and tease, especially with young people. I know I got a lot of my social skills from him, as well as my interest in technology.

My mother was very influential in my career choices as well. She is a very religious person who has dedicated herself to a life of service to her family and to the community. She instilled in me sound values about equity, respect, morality, ethics, tolerance, humility, and education, along with the importance of keeping commitments. She was also significant in developing an interest in music in all her children. In fact, all of us learned to play the guitar with considerable skill. On occasion, I was even able to earn a few dollars playing guitar in restaurants and bars in an area of Columbus called German Village. Not many folks in academic circles know that I am an avid country music and Rolling Stones fan.

I went to Central High School, an inner-city school serving the heart of the downtown area. The school was located at the western edge of the Scioto river, immediately across from the capitol complex. I used to gaze across the river at all those buildings, wondering what in the world the people who worked there did all day long.

Central High School (now the Center of Science and Industry) had a fantastic array of industrial arts and vocational education courses. I took every one I could manage to fit into my schedule. I loved them all, and the positive feelings of accomplishment that came from them were unlike any other courses I took in the curriculum. Most significant, though, were the teachers I had—they were awesome and the source of much of my desire to become a teacher myself! I especially enjoyed drafting and the problem solving and precision that those courses required.

As I got closer to high school graduation, I engaged in one of the required sessions with a school counselor about my future. He commended me on the fact that I was going to be the first in my family to have a high school diploma. But when I expressed my aspirations to go on for further schooling, he encouraged me to be proud of what I had already accomplished. He intimated that high school graduation was an honorable end in itself, and my aspirations might be best served by entering the workforce directly or going into the military. On the one hand, I was discouraged by the words of the counselor, implying that it was unlikely that I had what it took to succeed in college. On the other hand, his words were an even greater incentive for me to pursue my collegiate dream—it just seemed natural for me to think about further education in those subjects that I loved. Though I certainly did well in my practical courses in high school, I also managed to earn above average grades in all the academic subjects. I felt in my heart that I could be successful in college. On the way out of the counseling office I grabbed an application packet for Ohio State from the rack on the wall, under the pensive eyes of the counselor. I applied to Ohio State that evening.

Considering the interest and success I had in drafting, my teacher recommended that my classmate Roger Ballinger and I apply

for work at E. S. Preston, a local engineering firm. Mr. Preston admired our drafting teacher and hired both of us right out of high school. One of the major projects I worked on was a highway bridge located near Cambridge, Ohio. In doing so, I realized how important thoroughness and accuracy are, for even a minor error on my part could result in a major disaster for the company—this was the real world! Once the bridge was completed and I saw it, I felt overwhelmed with pride, wonder, and accomplishment. Those feelings are renewed each time I drive under it. Working summers and part time during the school year with Preston's would help pay for much of my undergraduate expenses. I also learned technical and people skills that served me well throughout my life. What's more, it taught me the value of teamwork.

The receipt of my acceptance letter to The Ohio State University was exciting for my whole family, since I would be the first to go to college. Mr. Preston was very encouraging and supportive to my classmate Roger and me, and we often talked with him about our future and Ohio State. In effect, he became the counselor that I didn't have in high school. However, I did take my high school counselor's advice regarding the military. Being unmarried in the midst of the Vietnam conflict, I worried that my Ohio State schooling would be interrupted by being drafted into the military. Like many young men in my situation, I decided to enlist in the National Guard near the end of my first year at Ohio State. I was accepted and went for basic training at Lackland Air Force Base in Texas and technical training at Langley AFB in Virginia. I spent the summer in the military during what would have been the Fall quarter of my sophomore year.

Working around my father and the kids in the neighborhood fixing and building things, my mother's value of education, a very positive experience in technical courses in high school and junior high with exemplary teachers, and my experience at Preston Engineering all played into my decision to become a technology teacher. It seemed like a perfect fit for my strengths and aspirations—and it was!

Over the course of your career you served as a public school teacher, a state supervisor, and a teacher educator. Few people have served in all three of these roles. What were some of the unique perspectives, challenges, and rewards that you encountered in these roles?

After graduating from Ohio State, I taught Industrial Arts and coached track at Southmor Junior High. Track was a good fit for me, as I was an avid track athlete and set a school record in the two-mile run at Central in 1967. The position was a great experience for me, but before graduating from Ohio State I worked with developmentally disabled children at Thurber Elementary School in a special program designed to provide industrial arts experiences for them. Over the school year teaching at Southmor,



I realized that I really missed working with elementary-level students. What really made an impression on me was the excitement that these children had for the learning activities we had designed for them. It became very apparent that engagement with hands-on technology activities was clearly the best means to help these children learn basic skills across the disciplines. In short, I felt a strong calling to serve the needs of these special students.

Dr. James Buffer, my undergraduate advisor at Ohio State, kept in touch with me and monitored the development of my career interests. He successfully encouraged me to return to Ohio State to pursue a master's degree with a dual concentration in Industrial Arts and Exceptional Children. In many respects, this paralleled his career path.

I really enjoyed the challenge and intellectual stimulation of graduate school. It was a turning point for me, placing me on a path to continue my studies toward a doctoral degree. While doing so, I gained experiences teaching undergraduates in a variety of subjects as a graduate teaching associate, got involved in professional conferences, read and wrote a lot, and studied with a level of motivation I had never before experienced. Though I still had a high level of technical interests, those interests were becoming surpassed by a deep and curious intrigue with the teaching-learning process, especially with regard to disadvantaged and underserved learners. I met lots of people across the profession, especially at conferences, and began to realize that these contacts were even more important than what I was learning through conference presentations.

Jim Buffer was an awesome mentor to me in countless ways. He got me involved in a wide range of activities, including assisting him in delivering inservice workshops for teachers of exceptional children throughout the state. Though I did not always appreciate it at the time, Jim Buffer continually pushed me out of my comfort

zone, and I have always felt indebted to him for doing so. He also taught me the skills I needed to handle myself successfully in academic circles, especially through lunches at the Ohio State Faculty Club.

I absolutely loved doctoral study—the research, the new knowledge, and the new teaching experiences I had as part of it. The opportunity to work with Donald Lux, Willis Ray, Keith Blankenbaker, and Bill Umstattd, along with Jim Buffer, was awesome, though I appreciated the significance of their contributions to our field even more after I graduated than when I was in the midst of my study. The Industrial Arts Curriculum Project that developed the *World of Construction* and the *World of Manufacturing* programs was in its final stage, so the faculty were refocusing back on teaching. There was a tremendous comradery and unique chemistry among the group of graduate students of which I was a part. The fact that several of these students came from across the country, some moving to Columbus with families, made me realize even more how significant Ohio State's graduate program was. Many of my colleagues in the doctoral program became lifelong friends, and we support one another in a variety of ways. What I gained from interacting and socializing with my fellow doctoral students was just as important to me as what I gained from my formal program of study. As my career developed, I have tried my best to engender this within my students throughout my career.

Shortly after completing my doctorate, I was encouraged to pursue a position opening with the Ohio Department of Education—an opportunity that came totally unexpectedly. Ironically, the office in which I would be working was in the same building about which I occasionally daydreamed from the windows of Central High School across the Scioto River. I accepted the position knowing that I would wear two hats. One was to work with Joe Logsdon as an industrial arts supervisor, while the second involved school facility inspection. The skills and knowledge I had learned in drafting, construction, electricity, mechanical, and other technical fields, along with having a teaching certificate, uniquely qualified me for wearing both hats. I traveled all over the state of Ohio, inspecting programs and buildings. As to be expected, I was treated with a high level of respect, since school officials were hoping to receive my “stamp of approval.” In most cases schools passed with flying colors, but when they did not it was often due to a lack of resources that is so often the case with poorer communities. This awareness of inequity due to economic factors beyond the control of the students or their parents left a lasting impression on me. The experience developed and honed my skills as a listener, fact finder, and problem solver.

During my fourth year with the State Department of Education, once again unexpectedly, I was contacted about a faculty position at Ohio State. Higher education was always in the back of

my mind, but I knew I did not want to move out of the Columbus area due to family connections and obligations. So the prospect of becoming a faculty member at a local university, let alone my alma mater, was overwhelmingly exciting to me. Somehow, my teaching experience, work with the State Department, interest in exceptional children, and technological education and experience seemed to be an ideal match to this faculty position, which was split between the Industrial Technology and Exceptional Children departments.

From growing up in a rather poor neighborhood, seeing how disadvantaged children were unfairly educated through my teaching experience, observing the disparity in school quality due to a lack of resources through my position as a State supervisor, and my own life experiences as a person of color, a theme of equity arose and set the stage for many aspects of my career.

You have had an interest in special needs learners that paralleled your interest in technology education. How has this shaped your philosophy of technology education?

As I was going through grade school and high school, I realized that I learned best and was most interested in lessons that were practical and involved authentic, hands-on activities. In fact, I discovered that this seemed to be true for virtually everyone, but especially true for those who have difficulty focusing on strictly verbal or abstract learning. As I began to work with disadvantaged children, I realized that the projects and activities in technology education that I enjoyed myself were overwhelmingly exciting to special needs children. What's more, these activities were the means to teaching children so many concepts and skills that they had been unable to learn before. Seeing the eyes of these kids change from dim candles to bright lights was so overwhelmingly rewarding to me! What I saw happening affected my entire career, and I was committed to providing the means for my students, especially those with an interest in exceptionalities, to see and realize the same thing I saw.

My shared appointment in Exceptional Children enabled me to interact and learn from students and faculty in both departments. I was able to recruit a number of graduate students who shared interests similar to mine. In the end, I feel that we put a new dimension and perspective to what was going on in both departments, especially in graduate student research.

Throughout the course of my career, I have heard people in the profession lament that industrial arts was a dumping ground for poor students and that we should become more “academic” to attract better and more qualified students. When I listen to these rants, it raises my ire a bit because I always thought that we had the ability to foster the success of students across the entire range of diversity, more so than any other subject in the school.

What greater legacy can a teacher, or an entire profession for that matter, leave? As a crusty sort of teacher told me years ago, “The good, smart kids will survive and prosper despite their teachers. It is all the rest of the kids that should be our focus.”

Most everyone in the profession who knew you thought of you as Mr. Ohio State. How did your strong allegiance and commitment to Ohio State develop?

My allegiance to Ohio State was probably prenatal! Throughout my neighborhood, children and adults were enamored with Ohio State. Much of it, of course, was related to athletics, especially football and coach Woody Hayes. Not many kids in my neighborhood were able to go to Ohio State, and among those who did, many were on athletic scholarships. The Ohio Stadium was like a cathedral of sorts, and Woody Hayes was admired like a deity. I have to admit that I attended most football and basketball home games. It was an awesome experience arranging for Woody to be the keynote speaker at the ITEA Conference in Columbus. Sometime after he was fired, my friend Jim LaPorte and I went to McDonalds on High Street for lunch. There was Woody, sitting by himself looking rather dejected, eating a Big Mac. We invited ourselves to sit at his table and had a great conversation that I will always remember. Though it was after Woody's tenure, I was appointed as an honorary coach for one of the football games. I am still overcome with emotion when I think about my name scrolling across the scoreboard and being able to sit with the team on the field during the entire game!

Though I had no idea about the significance of the history of industrial arts at Ohio State when I started as an undergraduate, I became a student of that heritage soon thereafter. Much of that early history is connected to Professor William E. Warner, the founder of Epsilon Pi Tau Honorary in 1929, founder of the American Industrial Arts Association in 1939, and lead author of *A Curriculum to Reflect Technology* (1947). The pioneering work that Warner started continued for decades. I could feel the spirit of what went on at Ohio State very personally and emotionally throughout my career. Ohio State is a great university, and I love to sing its praises to others. I am blessed to be intimately connected to it for most of my life.

What do you feel are some of the key aspects of the legacy that you left the profession through your research, service, and teaching?

As I think about retirement with increasing intensity lately, I have pondered a question like this a number of times. I thought about

all the research endeavors of which I was a part, especially the major standards development projects which, in many respects, is how leaders in the field came to know me. I thought about the work I did with a variety of organizations and service on editorial boards like the *Journal of Technology Education*. I thought about all the graduate students I have worked with and the research they had conducted under my advisement. I thought about the courses I taught and the workshops I prepared and delivered in technology education, diversity, equity, and special needs. Most all of these efforts resulted in something tangible: a research summary, a committee report, a manuscript, a dissertation or thesis from a student, a handout, a publication, and so on. I thought that my legacy would be in a huge box filled with these things. Then I thought how unrewarding this notion was. Is all that I have worked for all my life in that box? Really? All of a sudden it occurred to me that my real legacy, the one that I want to leave, is in the recollections of the people with whom I worked and whose minds I touched in a positive way: those with whom I learned, laughed, cried, struggled, encouraged, reprimanded, congratulated, and celebrated.

Thank you Dr. LaPorte for sharing Dr. Michael Scott's legacy. The Legacy Project has now interviewed 21 very influential leaders. It is beneficial for current (and future) leaders to read about the issues that existed and how they were addressed "back in the day." In a few months the next interview will appear in this journal. If you have a suggestion of a leader to recognize, contact the author with that person's name and contact information.



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James LaPorte, Ph.D., grew up in Missoula, Montana and earned degrees in Industrial Arts and Counseling from Montana State in Bozeman. He met Mike Scott when they both began doctoral study at Ohio State in 1976, and they became best friends from that point on, talking

by phone nearly every Friday evening, critiquing their scholarly work, sharing a room at ITEEA conferences, and visiting the Great Northwest. Jim retired from Virginia Tech (2003) and Millersville University of Pennsylvania (2011).