

Comments
on
Zdeněk Bažant
Chicago, Illinois
May 14, 2003

- This evening we have assembled to bestow on Professor Zdeněk Bažant the Lifetime Achievement Award for his many lasting contributions to structural engineering.
- I want to take a few moments this evening to share with you my thoughts on Zdeněk – and I can assure you that he is a very special individual.
- My first association with Professor Bažant was more than three decades ago – when I was pleased to welcome him to Northwestern University as a fellow Czech – and in the years that followed we became good friends and mutually respected colleagues.
- From the very beginning it was obvious that Zdeněk was especially gifted young man and a very intense individual.
- Those who know him well know that he works hard and he plays hard. If you have doubts, challenge him to a game of tennis – or paddle a kayak with him – or ski down the side of a mountain.
- I have always been intrigued with how effortlessly he seems to blend business and pleasure. If you were to ski down a slope with him – or climb a mountain – you probably would be happy with yourself to simply reach the bottom of the slope – or the top of the mountain. However, you would likely learn that – during this journey – Zdeněk dictated the draft for half of a technical paper – or solved in his head a challenging mathematical equation.
- Throughout the time I have known him – he was always been a very demanding individual – demanding of those around him – and demanding of himself.

- It is this special set of traits that has enabled him to attain the high professional stature that he has – and which, in turn, has motivated you to choose him for this honor this evening.
- Notwithstanding his unusual personal talents and unbelievably demanding work ethic, he has never lost sight of the many “helping hands” – students, colleagues, former teachers, family, and parents – that have aided him in achieving his many successes. He knows well that no man stands alone – no man is an island.
- And I assure that he is ever mindful of the political conditions that prevailed in his native land for so many years – the conditions that provided the impetus for him to leave family and friends and all that was familiar – more than three decades ago – to start a new career in a new land.
- It hardly needs to be said that he rejoiced most enthusiastically when these conditions changed so abruptly more than a decade ago.
- As most of us know full well – life takes many unplanned and often uncertain turns – and the events of Zdeněk’s life have resulted in our gain.
- We have been proud to have him on our faculty at Northwestern – and you are obviously proud to claim him as a member of the Illinois Section of ASCE.
- While he is a naturalized citizen of the United States of America – his seminal contributions to our profession have established him as a citizen of the world.
- Zdeněk – I congratulate you for receiving this award – and wish you continued success and good health for many years to come.