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2015 Atigun Award spotlight: Lifetime Achievement, Bill Frichtl



Alyeska Pipeline Service Company recognizes the exceptional work of TAPS employees and programs through the Atigun Awards programs. Atiguns are given in categories of Environment, Health and Safety, Innovation, Integrity, and Teamwork. In addition, Professionals of the Year and Lifetime Achievement awards may be presented. In the coming weeks, 2015 Atigun Award winners will be profiled on A-net and in other Alyeska communications.

2015 Atigun Award spotlight: Lifetime Achievement, Bill Frichtl

Reflecting on his Alyeska career, recent retiree Bill Frichtl said, "38 years is a long time, but it went quick." Time certainly flew for Frichtl, an electrical engineer who often found himself amid some of the most significant projects, changes and milestones in TAPS history.

Frichtl was there during construction and countless upgrades. He was there during peak throughput and high-profile emergencies. He was there for fax machines and computers. And he stayed for nearly 40 years because of the people, the work, the company culture and TAPS.

"The pipeline was my life and I enjoyed it," Frichtl said, smiling. "Simply put, it's been good. I wish I could have lasted a few more years. I'd do it again."



For his legacy of extraordinary dedication, excellent work and sharing his institutional knowledge with generations of TAPS workers, Frichtl has received a 2015 Atigun Award for Lifetime Achievement. Frichtl retired from Alyeska and his Senior Discipline Engineering Advisor position in November 2014.

To say that Frichtl has seen it all on TAPS isn't exactly accurate, but he has undoubtedly seen and experienced more than most in the TAPS workforce. His eyes were opened wide upon his arrival in Alaska in February 1976. He was a young electrical engineer from the Midwest suddenly charged with helping oversee the simultaneous construction of new pump stations along the 800-mile corridor that would contain TAPS.

"I was certainly amazed coming from Illinois' flat country to seeing Alaska's majestic mountains and big skies," he said. "It was memorable."

So was the work. Frichtl was based out of Fairbanks, but rarely there. He juggled multiple projects and teams with basic equipment and tools, and archaic communication devices. He traveled the line constantly to check in on the worksites, which isn't as glamorous as it sounds. The roads were rough and narrow, and the helicopter and plane rides were, in his words, scary. He still gets chills talking about an emergency helicopter

landing that came shortly after leaving Pump Station 4 and traveling over Atigun Pass on a foggy day.

Frichtl was excited to be part of building TAPS, a project of enormous magnitude and importance. He said he was always learning new things, especially from mechanical engineer Joe Willing, who he called Uncle Joe, and fellow engineer Paul Klueber, who was also helping build pump stations.

"It was all new to me – it was fun, but it was work," Frichtl said. "There was so much work to do, so many people and companies, so many shops. People were pretty much standing on top of each other working, especially when it came to startup. But being there early on and during startup was the best experience one could have."

Like everyone, Frichtl celebrated the end of construction. He also knew that his journey, like that of TAPS, was just beginning.

After startup, he relocated to Alyeska's Anchorage office, where he worked out of the Operations group. The team relentlessly sought system improvements and innovation. Work on TAPS "was never normal," Frichtl said, and he spent weeks in the field on massive mechanical and technological upgrades.



Hard work is in Frichtl's blood. He grew up on a farm in Southeast Illinois, the seventh in a family of 10 children. As an adult, he was so committed to his work he rarely took vacations. When he did, he was notorious for coming into the office occasionally to check in on projects anyway.

"I didn't feel like I needed time away from my work, at least not early on," he said. "I got into the system very deeply, intimately. I wanted to take advantage of the opportunities and work environment. And since I was involved with all the changes and upgrades, I wanted to be at the sites taking the extra steps to help people learn."

Among his favorite work moments, he said TAPS startup was momentous, and that two others stand out.

The startup of all of TAPS' 62 remote gate valves (RGVs) was a special highlight. "If anything, I have a soft spot for the RGVs – they are out of sight, out of mind, but they play a big role in the safe operations of the pipeline," he said. "They have to operational, and they need tender loving care."

And then there was the stretch in the late '80s when TAPS was transporting oil at unexpected highs and efficiency: "We were moving 2.1 million barrels a day for a month – now that was exciting," he said. "The orders from up high were, 'Don't shut down.' We used DRA (drag reducing agent) to pump beyond the mechanical horsepower. And I was involved in designing the DRA injection systems."

When asked the secret to his longevity, Frichtl quickly answered, "I never became a supervisor. I had a strong desire not to work as a supervisor. I know my limitations and it paid off. ... The other thing that is a special case to my longevity is my willingness to work. I did not have a close supervisor; they let me do what I thought was best. That's what kept me going."

For almost 40 years, Frichtl kept going. His work helped build TAPS, then keep it running and evolving. He knows his fingerprints are all over the system, and he's proud that he's a part of history.

"Eight hundred miles of pipe and all those pump stations in two years? And we built it without any high-tech equipment. It's amazing," Frichtl said. "And something like that is never going to happen again."

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