

Meet John H. Kroehling Class of '48

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John H. Kroehling planned to major in chemical engineering when he arrived at Virginia Tech in 1942. The war and football redirected his plans. In the spring of 1943, he answered a summons from the U.S. Army and joined the World War II effort. He returned to Virginia Tech in the spring of 1946 with the promise of a football scholarship.

Since the chemical engineering department "didn't want anyone who was going to be tied up with athletics," Kroehling transferred into ceramic engineering, a smaller department, which meant lots of individual attention and an informal atmosphere. "I liked going to school. I liked learning." He remembers one professor in particular, Dr. John Watson, who taught physical chemistry. He had a habit of writing on the blackboard and erasing almost as quickly and gave quizzes every day. More than fifty years later, Kroehling regularly uses information in his work that he learned from Dr. Watson.

After graduating in 1948, he went to work for the Roanoke-Webster Brick Company, where he had done undergraduate research. When the company folded two years later, he joined General Refractories, selling refractories and developing new markets for the company in Texas and then in Canada, where he met Joan Zimmelman. They have been married for over 50 years and have four children between them.

After 13 years with General Refractories, he left his position as assistant district manager in Philadelphia to work for DuPont, where he was instrumental in developing leftover technology that involved forming aluminum foil into a honeycomb and converting the aluminum to alumina through oxidation under carefully controlled conditions. The

resulting configuration was the same as that for ceramic honeycomb. This opened doors for DuPont to provide catalyst and catalytic oxidation systems for stationary sources of volatile organic carbon (VOC) or hydrocarbons, solvent vapor pollutants that must not be released into the atmosphere. DuPont sold this particular business to Engelhard Industries in 1983, and Kroehling went with the business since it was essentially his baby. He spent the next three years designing and selling catalyst modules to builders of oxidation systems.

He retired from Engelhard in 1986 and took a small equity position as vice president for a Brooklyn company that built the hardware into which DuPont and Engelhard catalysts were installed.

His second retirement came in 1991, and the Kroehlings moved south to Williamsburg, Virginia, where they built a house and an office, and J.H. Kroehling Associates, Inc. was born. The company specializes in industrial pollution control, and Kroehling designs catalytic oxidation systems and represents a fabrication company and a catalyst producer. The Kroehlings chose Williamsburg because "we wanted to live in a university town, and my wife is interested in history." Mrs. Kroehling stays busy volunteering at a medical clinic and at their parish church office. She also works in a church-operated shop that serves the many tourists who visit Williamsburg.

Reflecting upon factors that have influenced his work and lifestyle, Kroehling thinks of his parents. The children of German immigrants, they were both required to leave school in their early teens to go to work. "My father was very smart. He was able to take my calculus book and teach himself calculus...I did not get good grades in calculus." His father worked as an instrument maker for Western Electric, now AT&T Technologies, and he received an engineer's title based on experience. "There was no question that we (John, his brother, and his sister) were going to work as hard as we could to get as much education as we could." Kroehling also inherited a strong work ethic which he has passed on to his children.

He considers himself to be an educator, and he has conducted seminars to teach people about the technology that goes along with the product he sells, which he feels is secondary to the

educational aspect of his work. He enjoys sharing what he has learned with others.

He has gained a wealth of knowledge and experience over the years and would like to write a book someday when he has more time. "I'm not a salesman," he points out, even though he has been in that line of work for many years. He has developed sales skills and a definite philosophy. "I strongly believe in knowing as much about your customer's business as he does." When he agrees to take on a job, he believes his primary duty is to understand and solve the customer's problems. "Any equipment I sell him is my responsibility from then on, so that I'm always there if there is a problem." Part of his job is troubleshooting leftover problems. He does a lot of upgrading and rebuilding where suppliers have sold equipment and relinquished all responsibility. "Never promise anything you can't back up." He stands behind his product, but first he makes sure that product is dependable and will work for the customer.

Mr. Kroehling serves on the Advisory Board for the MSE Department, and he is also a member of the College of Engineering Committee of 100. The Kroehlings have donated money to fund two scholarships at Virginia Tech. They also made a deferred gift to the university to establish two John H. Kroehling Scholarships. Most recently, the Kroehlings have made a substantial donation to the VT FIRE building fund. Construction on the Kroehling Advanced Materials Foundry started in March 2010, and classes began at the foundry in January 2011.



Joan Kroehling, Paul Huffman, and John Kroehling