

ALUMNI OF THE MONTH

Name: Dale Foster

Year of Graduation: 1973

What have you done since graduating from Port Allegany High School?

"Following high school, I served 4 years in the US Air Force, in Denver, Colorado. I was a dental technician and learned I didn't want to be a dentist.

After my military service, I earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Solar Engineering Technology from Colorado Technical College (now University) in 1981. Solar was not really a thing back then, but I thought it had a future. After college, I became a full-time instructor at Jordan College Energy Institute in Michigan. I taught a variety of engineering technology courses including active and passive solar energy heating, electronic controls, HVAC, earth sheltered buildings, and wind energy. Teaching was perhaps the most challenging and rewarding work of my career.

In 1984, I moved to California where the wind farms were just getting started and became Manager of Wind Farm Operations for Enertech Corporation. The company manufactured wind turbines, and I ran the operation and maintenance of hundreds of Enertech wind turbines in the Palm Springs area. The wind turbines were small compared to today's massive wind systems.

After 2 years on the wind farms, I was recruited by AeroVironment to join their AeroSciences Division as a wind energy consultant. AeroVironment, located in the Los Angeles area, was led by Dr. Paul MacCready, the father of human-powered flight. Google him! I was honored to work closely with Paul for many years. An interesting part of being a consultant is that the client and job frequently changes. From the late 80s to the mid-90s, I did technical and economic feasibility studies of wind farm projects, and managed wind energy research projects. I wrote winning grant proposals to develop electric assist bicycles which led to a joint venture with GT Bicycles named Charger Electric Bicycles. I worked to develop customer markets (starting with the police) and helped create new California laws for these cool electric bikes.



After General Motors bought a stake in AeroVironment, I helped GM find non-automotive uses and markets for technologies from the GM Research Lab. In 1995, I led the development of a GM-sponsored human-powered (arms-only) vehicle that set world speed records. I was the Product Line Manager for AeroVironment's electric vehicle fast-charging stations. These high-power public charging stations could recharge an EV in 30 minutes – such was California in the 1990s. I loved the diverse work at AeroVironment and, as a bonus, there I met my wife. Kathy and I will celebrate our 30th anniversary this year.

After 16 years at AeroVironment, I decided I wanted to get back to my renewable energy roots, so in 2001, I joined Tetra Tech, an energy and environmental consulting firm, in their San Diego office. I worked for Tetra Tech for the next 14 years; the last 10 were from my remote home office in north Idaho. (The move was prompted after our San Diego home became ashes in a massive 2003 wildfire.) I helped manage teams of Tetra Tech energy experts that worked on US Military bases throughout the world. We developed energy projects that saved energy, water and money. I conducted numerous renewable energy studies for all branches of the US military, the Veterans Administration, US State Department, and the private sector.

I “retired” in 2014 and moved to the retirement community of Sun City Oro Valley near Tucson Arizona. I'm very active as a volunteer in this community of 4,500 residents. I serve on committees to improve energy and water use and led the development of a large solar project that provides most of our electricity and will save the community over a million dollars. For that work, I received the 2021 Distinguished Service Award from the community. I continue to offer advice to anyone interested in going solar. Retirement means time to do things I enjoy – volunteering, reading, writing, continuous learning, skiing, yoga, riding electric bikes, making art and sculptures."

Where do you currently live?

Oro Valley, Arizona, (north of Tucson)

Who was your favorite teacher in high school? Why were they your favorite?

Duane and Mary Gregg – They were great teachers and cared about the students. Mary told me several years ago that whenever she saw one of her students just staring blankly out the window she would think – well, maybe they're like Dale and it will be okay. Most useful class would have to be Typing by Miss Swanson. And the one I best remember was Survival class by Doc McCormick.

What is your fondest memory of Port Allegany High School?

Port was a wonderful place to grow up and I had many great experiences in high school, even though I was mostly a C student, a terrible drummer in the band (sorry Mr. Moyer), and a football team 3rd stringer who never got in the game. I have many classmates from high school with whom I am still good friends today. High School friendships do indeed last a lifetime.