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SEL senior vice president retires

PULLMAN, Wash.—After nearly 17 years, Ron Schwartz, senior vice president at Schweitzer Engineering Laboratories, will retire at the end of June. Schwartz joined SEL in 1998 and has served in leadership positions in several divisions, including Quality, Research and Development, Marketing and Manufacturing.

Schwartz retires after a 45-year career in quality and reliability engineering. During his time at SEL, he played a pivotal role in establishing many of the processes and measures the company follows for maintaining its industry-leading quality. He helped SEL achieve its initial ISO 9001 certification in 1994 and introduced the company to best practices outlined in the book “World Class Manufacturing.”



In conjunction with Schwartz’s retirement, Tony Lee, director of Quality, who has been with SEL for more than 20 years, assumes responsibility for the Quality Division.

“I grew up at SEL, and that means I grew up using systems, processes and philosophies established by Ron,” said Lee. “I’m excited to take the lead in Quality, but we all will miss Ron’s knowledge, experience, insight and mentorship.”

Schwartz began shaping SEL quality even before he joined the company. Schwartz and Edmund O. Schweitzer, III, SEL founder and president, met in 1968 while working for the Department of Defense and have remained lifelong friends.

“Ron came to town for a visit when we were still operating out of my basement,” recalls Schweitzer. “We were sitting at my kitchen table and catching up. I shared with him what we were doing at SEL, and he said, ‘Ed, you’ve got to build a basic quality system.’ And, I said, ‘what’s that?’ That discussion became the basis for the quality system that we still follow to this day.

“Ron introduced us to practices like just-in-time manufacturing, mistake-proofing, posting process measurements, getting to root cause and turning a problem on and off,” said Schweitzer, who noted that the new processes helped the company dramatically reduce product lead times while enabling quality to skyrocket. “Throughout the years, Ron’s insights and expertise have been essential to the quality of our products and processes.”

Schwartz also helped ingrain a number of key concepts into the company’s culture. He taught that delivering consistently high-quality products requires simplicity of design, the best materials and testing well beyond specifications.

While Schwartz is looking forward to spending more time on hobbies like golfing, sailing, amateur radio and playing with his four grandchildren, he also plans to share his quality engineering expertise with smaller companies as a consultant.

"I've enjoyed developing our processes and seeing employees in every area of the company take ownership of quality," said Schwartz. "I will miss working with the many friends I have made at SEL."

Before joining SEL, Schwartz worked at Siltek, Ltd., Tektronix, Sequent Computer Systems and founded International Quality Associates, a consulting and training firm that helped companies develop and implement management systems. He earned a bachelor's degree in electrical engineering from The Ohio State University and a master's degree in electrical engineering from the University of Maryland.

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