Biography:
Born/Raised in South Miami
Early Interests: Music/Percussion, Volleyball, & Sailing
Stetson University: B.A. Physics May 1985
University of Florida: B.S. Civil Engineering, Dec 1984
UF Transportation Research Center:
Transportation Air Quality Study, Meteorological Effects

Married in 1990: Spouse, Diana
Son, Kyle
Consultant: Transportation Engineering (Water Resources and Environmental Permitting Focus)
Current Volunteer Efforts:
Lakewood High - School Advisory Council
SPYC St. Petersburg Sailing Center Committee Chair

Interests: (Power) Boating, Sailing and (watching my son's) Sailing Regattas, & (Watching) Beach Volleyball

Alumni Profile: Richard E. Sowers, Jr., P.E.
Stetson University Class of 1985

Open Letter to Stetson University Physics and Pre-Engineering Students:

Born and raised in South Miami, I left for Stetson University in the Fall of 1979 (following Hurricane David up the State! The hurricane party was just ending upon my arrival.). In my childhood, I was fortunate to be able to grow up in the south Florida lifestyle, where academic interests focused on math and the sciences, while enjoying music (percussion), volleyball, racquetball, and sailing (on the fun side of life). The college years included Stetson University (B.A. Physics/Pre-Engineering) and the University of Florida (B.S. Civil Engineering). My recollection is that my room-mate and I were the only two pre-engineering majors at the time, with the program being in its early days. The storied beginnings of the dual-degree track were based on hand-written notes and slightly less formal coordination of course- work. In the mean time, joining the Lambda Chi Alpha fraternity and appreciating the changes found through the new lifestyles in Deland and Gainesville would set the tone for significant positive changes in my personality that I did not even understand were happening. What I have come to realize is the importance of these benefits related to the business side of engineering, as well as some real world appreciation for a "well-rounded" education received while at Stetson. I feel that the liberal arts side of the pre-engineering coursework is equally important to the technical side of the upper division classes required for an engineering degree.

The message that I'd like to focus on, with this opportunity to interact with current and (hopefully) future students, is the importance of what I'm calling a "well-rounded" education I received during my time at Stetson University. Besides the content of the curriculum, there is also a tremendous benefit of getting to know such high-caliber and caring professors, in addition to the one-on-one interaction afforded by lower student/teacher ratios. Upon transferring to UF, I heard many stories of their larger class sizes and other less desirable characteristics of taking freshman and sophomore level classes at a much larger institution. I have to emphasize that this is my opinion and is based on my experience, and that some

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students may not feel this is an issue; however, my guess is that for many this will strike a chord that resonates as an important consideration.

After college, my desire to live on the west coast of Florida (through many earlier vacations) played into my first career opportunity being in the Tampa Bay area, specifically St. Petersburg, Florida. Through the years, my engineering design efforts have been focused on the water resources and environmental permitting needs for transportation projects primarily in Florida. I enjoyed working with one consulting firm through last year, along with its significant growth and leadership opportunities. From 2000-2008, I served as the Technical Resource Leader for the Hydraulics and Drainage Design Technical Resource Group. The individuals in this group provided company-wide technical guidance. The "people-skills" that began with the college experience and were furthered through on-the-job training sessions have been instrumental in allowing me to excel in both the technical and leadership aspects of my corner of the profession. I am indebted to many talented individuals that have provided guidance along the way.

However, as with many business sectors, the current state of the economy has had far reaching effects and I recently was forced to make a career-path change to a new consulting firm. This new position offers new challenges and I'm confident that my past experience will prove beneficial in this new endeavor. On the design side, the state of Florida's water quality permitting requirements are also currently undergoing major changes and the need for remaining technically proficient is as important as ever. With so much to look back and reflect upon, I feel blessed to have so many good memories of past events, along with the support of friends and family.

Through those earlier times, I met my wife of 20-years and have a son that will be starting college next year at Florida Atlantic University pursuing a degree in Ocean Engineering. The friends and colleagues that have been a mainstay over the years have opened doors that I never dreamed would be there, and the more recent re-acquaintance with Stetson has also been an enjoyable experience.

Recent volunteer activities that have brought me back to the Stetson campus on occasion have been to serve with a design advisory committee for the Greek Housing Task Force that helped to guide the planning for the redevelopment of fraternity row, as well as completing the sessions for the second annual Leadership Stetson program. For me, it's an honor to have been asked to participate with this alumni profile and to take the opportunity to reflect somewhat on what I've been involved with up to this point. Given the diverse paths that the physics majors of my "era" have taken, I feel that any of them could be considered distinguished alumni. Names that come to mind are Monty Laycox, Terry Ward, Lane Kimbrough, Anna-Marie Helton, Rick Stone, Joe Abbott, and Dan Keane; I'd love to reconnect with past Stetson alumni and offer an open invitation to current and potential Stetson physics/pre-engineering students to discuss future opportunities. My contact information is provided below:

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