

Mr David Dumas Coffey

The degree of Doctor of Engineering (*honoris causa*) was conferred upon David Dumas Coffey at the Faculty of Engineering and Information Technologies graduation ceremony held at 2.00pm on 15 May 2009.



The Deputy Chancellor Alan Cameron AM conferring the honorary degree upon Mr Coffey, photo, copyright Memento Photography.

Citation

Deputy Chancellor, I have the honour to present Mr David Dumas Coffey for admission to the degree of Doctor of Engineering (*honoris causa*).

Having obtained a Bachelor of Engineering, in Engineering Technology, at The University of Sydney in 1948, Mr Coffey commenced his illustrious career. After a brief period at James Hardie and Co making asbestos cement products, David Coffey joined the Public Works Department of NSW in 1950 which led him to work in the Snowy Mountains Scheme. Here he was put in charge of investigation of materials and testing. With no formal education in earth and rock materials, Mr Coffey taught himself through reading text books on the subject. These origins provided the platform for Mr Coffey's lifelong career in soil mechanics and foundation engineering.

With a desire to gain some private practice experience in the newly evolving division of civil engineering now known as Geotechnical Engineering, Mr Coffey emigrated to Canada in late 1956 and worked for a brief period on the Terzaghi Dam in central British Columbia. He then joined the Department of Highways in Victoria, British Columbia. When a colleague, left the Department to establish a private practice in geotechnical work, specialising in landslides, he invited Mr Coffey to join him. This move launched David Coffey into a career in geotechnical consulting for which he is recognised as a pioneer.

As the company became established and successful, Mr Coffey made a decision to return to Australia in December 1958 and in the following month commenced his own practice in geotechnical work from his home in St Ives. He surmounted the challenge of obtaining recognition of the geotechnical speciality as being a truly professional pursuit and thereby pioneered the profession of geotechnical engineers as it is now known in Australia.

Mr Coffey's company is credited with having trained most of those engaged as geotechnical engineers in those early years. As Australia invested in infrastructure development in the 1960s and 1970s requiring high geotechnical inputs, the Coffey trained geotechnical engineers worked on projects including the development of Canberra and the iron ore development in the Pilbara region of WA.

In addition, the Coffey company expanded into the South East Asian region, providing services following Australian Aid grants and other international loans.

Coffey International Limited, as the company became, is now a major consulting speciality group, operating

in 60 countries around the world with over 4000 employees and is listed as one of the top 300 companies on the Australian Stock Exchange. Mr Coffey continued as Chairman of Coffey International until 1984 when he relinquished his position.

In 1998, the Australian Geomechanics Society presented Mr Coffey their most prestigious award, the John Jaeger Memorial Medal, in recognition of his contribution to the Geomechanics development and practice in Australia.

Mr Coffey has partnered significantly with the School of Civil Engineering at this University in training future generations of engineering professionals.

Among Mr Coffey's other achievements and interests are farming and aviation. David Coffey developed an interest in farming when his family bought a 3000 acre property in Wellington, NSW. Here he learnt farming techniques for both winter and summer crops as well as sheep and cattle.

In order to enhance the development of sustainable agriculture, in 2008, Mr Coffey and his wife Judith jointly endowed a professorial chair in this field at The University of Sydney.

Mr Coffey's contribution to the community includes service for six years as a part-time member of the Commonwealth Government's Administrative Appeals Tribunal hearing appeals arising out of Commonwealth Administrative Law, including those in the areas of Customs, Civil Aviation and Social Security.

Having pursued his interest in aviation, Mr Coffey and his wife Judith learned to fly in 1967 and became experienced aviators. In 1995, Mr Coffey fulfilled a personal ambition when he acquired a brand new Mooney Ovation – a single engine fast retractable four place sophisticated aircraft, had it fitted out with ferry tanks to hold sufficient fuel for up to 18 hours non stop flying and flew it back solo to Australia via Hawaii, American Samoa, Fiji and finally direct to Coffs Harbour in NSW.

Mr Coffey is a pre-eminent geomechanical engineer, a generous supporter of the profession of engineering and a worthy recipient of this university's recognition.

Deputy Chancellor, I present Mr David Coffey for admission to the degree of Doctor of Engineering (honoris causa), and I invite you to confer the degree upon him.