

Mark Havel

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By Neil Schroeder

Mark Havel: Mechanical Engineer, Inventor

Mark was an engineering graduate of Oregon State University. His thinking was often “out of the box” and his ideas nearly always were toward products that made life easier for the operator. He was interested in materials that could be economically and easily transformed into useful products that would help the operator more easily accomplish his tasks.

Mark worked in several different mediums. He built fiberglass/plastic models and products, including the diffusers on the Waldport Highway 101 bridge. The lights on the bridge are bright and beautiful because his skills and design ideas are a part of them. He also built fiberglass car bodies and boats as well as the fiberglass diffuser top for the outdoor Portland Loo.

Perhaps his best-known products are the log arches. Those of us familiar with the forestry department at OSU will remember the huge log arch which stood behind the old forestry building on campus. Mark modified that design to handle logs of many sizes. His Junior arch he used to work with smaller trees that were hung up on near by tree branches and could put the tree on the ground with just a few movements of the small arch, again using ergonomic concepts. His other arches are designed for larger logs which can be moved with ATV's or small tractors. With an arch on either end of the log he could move the log through the forest without getting it covered with dirt and mud. This saved time and chainsaw chains. With the arches a landowner can harvest without using large, expensive equipment.

One of his best known but now no longer available machines was his “Ascender”, a device with bicycle pedals attached in such a way that one could climb many feet up a tree while trimming the lower branches.

Recently Mark began to work with small, portable sawmills. He purchased a Linn Mill which had no hydraulics to help move logs into position for proper milling. His thought was that he could build ergonomic function into the mill carriage in such a way that with just human strength and leverage, the log could be moved and placed for accurate milling.

Mark researched and purchased an American made kinetic log splitter called a SuperSplit. He wanted a very reliable and low maintenance splitter that might have the capability of being very fast. He designed and built a trailer with wheels wide enough to give it good stability, then built the SuperSplit into the trailer. His finished product used a winch system with a hub attached to the splitter motor. This winch could pull logs up onto the trailer table where they could be cut into uniform rounds for splitting. He could load, cut rounds and split well over a cord in an hour with this machine and could do this work anywhere the logs were available. This allowed a landowner to move the trailer to the job site and accomplish considerable firewood production in a short time.

Mark worked with Logrite Tools to produce an ergonomic handle for the SuperSplit line. Instead of pulling the actuator handle with your hand above the machine, you can now pull up with your hand

right at your side. This saves rotator cuff injury and again makes the work efficient at an ergonomic level.

Mark Havel: Tree Farmer, Volunteer

Mark was a second-generation land owner. He and his family hand planted his tree farm. The forest is diversified with Douglas-fir, cedar, ash, maple and other species indigenous to the Oregon Coast Range. As the trees grew, he would prune to grow straight trunks with few or no knots. He found that in the spring he could harvest 6-12 inch diameter trees, remove the bark with just his hands and a small knife and produce a beautiful post or pole suitable for architectural use in unique construction projects. He told me he would fill a trailer and set it up next to Highway 18 and soon sell it for \$1000 or more!

How Mark's "Forest Dan" persona came into being, I have not learned. But as Forest Dan, Mark would come to your land and give you his good advice on how to manage your tree farm. It was a pleasure to have him look at your forest and give his advice, often for no fee, and hear his suggestions for the property.

How many classes has Mark Havel taught at Tree School? The list is very long with demonstrations of chainsaw use and maintenance, tree falling, splitting firewood, harvesting with small equipment, and portable sawmill demos as well as many other classes. He will be sorely missed in the coming years.

Several years ago we asked him what he would do on an Oregon Woodland Cooperative member's property to bring in some quick income. He showed how he would convert the small timber and logs into firewood and amazed the owner with how much he could realize in just a short time.

Mark Havel: Marketeer, Salesman, Entrepreneur

As Mark began producing his arches and tools for managing small woodlands, he knew he would need to find and build a market to support his investment and increase income. He bought a high-cube truck/van, loaded his products into it and set out across the country.

Sawmill and Woodlot Management magazine periodically puts on what they call a "Shootout" which compares logging and wood-handling equipment in sort of a county fair atmosphere. Producers from all over the world send their people and sample product to these events to promote their wares. Mark participated in this and many other similar situations. He would call ahead to the promoters, ask for logs and a Honda four-wheeler to be available and then demonstrate his several arches and his trailered SuperSplit.

With his warm smile and obvious intelligence, he was welcomed by the promoters. Eventually Logrite Forestry Tools and Supersplitter arranged for him to become a distributor, and Logrite purchased the rights to sell his inventions. These arrangements allowed him to move on to new inventions and new ways to make the life of the small woodland owner easier and more pleasant.

Mark Havel: Husband, Father, Friend, Cook

Mark and Loree were delightful hosts. Back in the day, Mark earned pocket money to support his ski-bum years in Montana. He built a wheeled cart with a small burner and grill attached and carried the ingredients for a sumptuous breakfast on the cart. He would wheel the cart to tables in the dorm and

make breakfast for the skiers right at their tables. Ardis and I, and many others, were beneficiaries of his skills and enjoyed mushroom omelets made in his kitchen at their tree farm.

When their daughter Liška announced her wedding day, Mark went into high gear and produced enough very uniquely designed tables and benches to seat 200+ guests in a clearing in their forest. In addition, they cut and split many cords of firewood and stacked them in such a way to make a dance floor and a food and drink bar, floored by planks cut on his portable sawmill.

To know Mark Havel and spend some time with him was always a tremendous learning experience. As he prepared to leave his house and put on his boots, he would ergonomically lace them up with just one hand! When moving through the woods or demonstrating a tool, he always moved quickly and a person had to keep up. His garden was not the usual till-plant-weed plot. He terraced the area so that water could move from one level to the next and get maximum benefit to the garden. He planned the area so that the plants that needed the most care were where he would spend most of his time.

When planning a timber harvest he would set two chainsaws under tarps close to each area where he planned to work. He made sure his roads and trails would allow him to load and take the long log to the landing without harming any other trees.

His shop is a monument to his creative thinking. The back of this log structure is built with the logs alternating so that the wall is straight and the same height at each end. The sides of the building are tapered so that the butt ends of the logs are toward the front and therefore a higher wall than at the back. This gives the building proper slope for the roof to shed rain. The entrance area to the shop is concrete and accommodated his installation of a steel rail system. This allowed him to mill up to a 60' log with a very inexpensive portable mill.

This man of many talents was also very concerned about your future and mine. He thought long and hard about the incredible consumption of fossil fuels and what that might eventually do for society and to the world. At one point he resolved to ride his bicycle to as many events as possible just so he did not over-consume.

I can only speculate about the concepts, products, inventions, and ideas that we might have enjoyed in the future due to this man's incredible energy and inventive spirit. He is already sorely missed. We in this community have been blessed to have known him and enjoyed the many tools and ideas he has shared over the years.

Neil first met Mark on a tree farm site visit. He has taken Mark's classes at Tree School and visited Mark's home and forest several times over the years. Their friendship and business activity grew as they got to know each other. For over 30 years Neil has been directly involved with the Oregon Woodland Cooperative which was co-founded by his father in 1981. He is now the OWC executive administrator.