Donald Hoffman: Full speed ahead

by Michael McQueen

*The 59th president of the American Nuclear Society is a firm believer in the benefits of nuclear science and technology and in the notion that ANS must become **the** society for all NS&T professionals.*

Donald Hoffman is the son of a lieutenant commander in the U.S. Navy and a Navy veteran himself, which may explain the approach he is taking to his new role as president of the American Nuclear Society: full speed ahead.

"I intend to use my business, industry, and society experience to transform ANS into a more businesslike organization," declared Hoffman, who took office at the ANS Annual Meeting in Atlanta last month. "An organization that significantly enhances the individual and corporate membership experience, creates an easily identifiable home for all nuclear science and technology professionals, increases the breadth and scope of the society's domestic and international relevance and influence, and becomes financially sustainable."

That may sound like a lot to accomplish over the course of a one-year presidency, but Hoffman is not exactly what you would term an underachiever. An early indication of his abilities came when Hoffman's teachers suggested that he be moved directly from the fifth grade to the ninth, based on his performance in reading and math. (His mother nixed the idea, considering her son to be too small in stature.) Another clue: During his nine-year career in the Navy's nuclear submarine service, Hoffman received two Navy Commendation Medals, three Navy Achievement Medals, and numerous Letters of Commendation. He was also named Submarine Force Atlantic Fleet Sailor of the Year in both 1978 and 1979—a feat that no other sailor has ever accomplished. And then there's EXCEL Services Corporation, the internationally recognized nuclear engineering consulting firm that Hoffman founded and that he currently runs as president and chief executive officer.

Hoffman has spent much of the last year in the role of ANS vice president/president-elect traveling the globe, delivering presentations on the benefits of nuclear science and technology because of his passion for the field. "I believe that since the discovery of fission 75 years ago, nuclear science and technology has provided a tremendous benefit to enhance and improve the quality of life of all humankind," he said. "But I also believe that ANS can provide a much better service in being more beneficial and valuable to its membership and the constituency it serves. I believe I can bring a business acumen that actually enhances and improves the way the society achieves its vision, mission, and goals."

Growing up, moving around

Hoffman was born on May 19, 1950, at Mainside Naval Hospital in Pensacola, Fla. His father, Hubert Lee Hoffman, then an aviation electrician's mate 2nd class, was stationed there at the time, maintaining and repairing electronic systems on Navy attack and fighter aircraft. "My father was definite-

ly a very impressive individual," Hoffman said. "He became one of the youngest senior chief petty officers, or E-8s, in the Navy at 28 years of age, and at 29, he became an E-9, or master chief petty officer. When he retired in 1974, he was the Navy's Atlantic Fleet air wing maintenance officer." Hoffman's mother, Mary Louise, was an accountant who handled the books for Navy Point Stores in Pensacola. "My mother was a genius with numbers," Hoffman said, "a real wizard."

In July 1952, Hoffman became an older brother with the birth of Pamela Gayle and, 11 minutes later, the unexpected arrival of Paula Dayle. "My mother had been told that she was going to have one very large baby," Hoffman said. "At the time, they couldn't tell there were two. My parents had picked out only one name for a girl, Pamela Gayle, so they chose Paula Dayle for its similarity."

The family continued to reside in Pensacola until Hoffman turned 3, at which point his father was restationed to San Diego, Calif. They spent a little over a year in San Diego, and then it was on to Houston, Texas, for a few months, followed by a return to Pensacola as Hoffman approached the age of 5. The family remained in Pensacola for a few years, and Hoffman was able to attend first, second, and third grades there, but in his fourth-grade year, his father was restationed yet again, this time to Sangley Point in the Philippines.

"In the Philippines, we lived in a really small Quonset hut on a half-by-half-mile isthmus with a connection to Cavite City," Hoffman recalled. "When we were first flying over there—now mind you, I was not quite 9—the older chief told me that there was a plug there on the island that was hidden, but that if I could find it and pull it, the isthmus would sink. I spent almost every opportunity when I wasn't doing something else looking for that plug."

After a year in the Philippines, the Hoffmans returned to Pensacola. The family continued its peripatetic military lifestyle as Hoffman entered his teen years, living mostly in the Norfolk and Virginia Beach, Va., areas. "I went to a different high school in each one of my ninth, tenth, eleventh, and twelfth-grade years," Hoffman said. "I think that the constant moving and having to make acquaintances over and over again contributed to my ability to adapt to almost any situation and the ability to find solutions to constant change and disruption."

Hoffman's recollections of his parents suggest a disciplined upbringing. "My father was always saying, 'Any job worth doing is worth doing right,'" Hoffman said. "He was very demanding and not forgiving of much. My mother was a stickler for detail in everything and could evaluate most situations almost immediately. This served her well as a bridge player. She became a Life Master in bridge in a very short period of time and excelled at every tournament she played in. I

Hoffman at age 4: The start of a love for fast cars

Hoffman at age 5, sitting atop a jet, with his father in the cockpit, at Naval Auxiliary Air Station Saufley Field, in Pensacola, Fla., in 1955

believe I inherited those characteristics from each of them, and coupled with my experiences in the Navy, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, and the nuclear industry, I believe it has contributed to aspects of my personality and my work ethic."

From college to the Navy

After graduating from high school in 1968, Hoffman planned to attend the University of Virginia on an ROTC scholarship, but those plans changed when he was selected as the secondary, or backup ROTC candidate, rather than the primary. Instead, he attended Old Dominion University, in Norfolk, where he majored in physics. "I always liked math and science and technical things," Hoffman noted. "Growing up, I thought I was going to be an astronomer. I loved reading about the stars. So I thought physics sounded interesting."

As his family lacked the necessary financial resources, Hoffman worked evenings and weekends to put himself through school. He washed dishes and waited tables every weekend at the Navy enlisted mess at Naval Air Station Oceana in Virginia Beach, 16 hours on Saturday and 12 hours on Sunday. He also worked part time as a night manager at a Virginia Beach motel.

Then, in the fall of 1969, having already finished his sophomore year by attending summer sessions, Hoffman was offered an opportunity to work as a supervisor for Virginia Beach Parks and Recreation. "The only reason I took that job was to put away money so I didn't have to continue working 40-plus hours a week when I went back for my junior and senior years, which I had planned to do in September of 1970," Hoffman said.

In March of 1970, however, Uncle Sam came knocking. Loudly. "It was in the time of the Vietnam War, when they did the 'bingo ball' selection for the draft," Hoffman explained. "My birthday came up number six. Since I was still enrolled in college, with acceptance to begin my junior year in September, I thought I still had a college deferment. I discovered after a few phone calls that this wasn't the case."

Hoffman at age 8

Mary Louise and Hubert Hoffman, along with dog Prince, in Virginia Beach, Va., in 1966

Hoffman went down to the recruiting station with the intention of signing up to fly helicopters in Vietnam as a commissioned officer in the U.S. Marine Corps. "Having been the dependent of an enlisted person and an officer, I wanted to be commissioned initially instead of being enlisted," he said.

But all that changed once Hoffman's father discovered his son's plan. "He went down and spoke to a staff sergeant at the recruiting station and urged him—and I do mean urged—to tear up my request to be commissioned in the Marine Corps," he said. "So it was my father, at least in part, who guided me toward the Navy's nuclear program.

In the latter part of 1970, Hoffman enlisted in the Navy as a nuclear electronics technician because, he said, "that was the highest level of the enlisted technical training and allowed me to become a reactor operator." Hoffman attended Electronic Technicians "A" School in 1970 and 1971, and then moved on to Nuclear Power School in Bainbridge, Md., for classroom training, and Nuclear Prototype School in Saratoga Springs, N.Y., for training at the S3G nuclear submarine prototype facility.

After finishing Prototype School in December 1972, Hoffman reported to the USS *Finback* SSN-670 (an SSN-637–class fast-attack nuclear submarine) in January 1973. Three days later, the *Finback* departed for a six-month Mediterranean run.

During those six months, Hoffman worked in the Reactor Controls Division. By the time the *Finback* returned to Norfolk in July 1973, he had qualified on all of his primary work stations—Auxiliary Machinery Room 2 Upper Level, Reactor Operator, and Shutdown Maneuvering Area Watch—and in Submarines.

"We went through a number of deep dives, went to test depth, did multiple emergency blow exercises, and performed other special operations," Hoffman said. "It was truly a very fascinating time for me, those first six months on a submarine."

During his seven years on the *Finback*, Hoffman had the opportunity to serve in a number of capacities, including Reactor Controls Division Leading Petty Officer, Reactor Controls Division Officer, Refueling Officer during a refueling overhaul, Operational Reactor Safeguard Examination (ORSE) Engineering Watch Supervisor and Engineering Officer of the Watch, Engineering Training Officer, and Assistant Engineer. Under his leadership, the Reactor Controls Division achieved two essentially perfect ORSE examinations, in 1976 and 1978. "An ORSE is a periodic examina-

Hoffman's three sons in 1981 (from left): Adam, not yet 1; Matthew, 10; and Jefferson, 2

Hoffman with twin sisters Paula (left) and Pamela on an EXCEL Services cruise in 1988

tion by a group of nuclear-trained officers from Naval Reactors who evaluate the performance of the nuclear submarine or nuclear surface ship engineering department through examinations, records review, and response to emergency and upset conditions," Hoffman explained.

Also while on the *Finback*, Hoffman completed the vast majority of his qualifications for officer of the deck, both surface and submerged, became eligible for promotion to chief petty officer, and was selected for limited duty officer.

Despite these advancements, however, Hoffman left the Navy in 1979. "Leaving the Navy was a very difficult decision for me, as I had essentially been in it all my life," Hoffman said. "I had already accomplished so much and wanted to do more, but I felt that I would not be able to do it without a college degree. I had interviewed with Admiral Rickover, but even with all my qualifications, I could not go back on a submarine as a division officer or engineer officer without a degree, as this was Admiral Rickover's commitment to Congress."

Family ties

Hoffman married in 1977—acquiring a stepson, Matthew, in the process—and moved into a two-bedroom apartment in Norfolk's Little Creek area, not far from the submarine pier. His son Jefferson was born in 1979, and son Adam in 1981. They both attended high school at Georgetown Preparatory School in North Bethesda, Md. After graduation, Jefferson went to Dickinson College in Pennsylvania, where he received a bachelor's degree in international business and management, and then to the Maine Maritime Academy, where he earned a master's degree in management and logistics. He has worked for a number of companies, including his father's firm and CH2M Hill, in project management and logistical support. Currently, he is working for EXCEL as a project logistics manager in support of a number of the firm's U.S. and international projects. Jefferson married his wife, Laura, in 2007, and they have two children, Stella Evangeline, born in 2009, and Skyden Storm, born just last December.

Taking quite a different path from his brother, Hoffman's son Adam attended Virginia Tech via the ROTC, becoming both the executive officer and regimental commander of the Corps of Cadets at the school (a distinction, Hoffman pointed out, that no one else has ever achieved). He was later commissioned as a second lieutenant in the Marine Corps, where he became a Special Forces recon officer, doing tours of duty in Iraq. After more than eight years in the Marines, he is now a civilian involved in special operations support for the Department of Defense.

Hoffman's stepson, Matthew, graduated from the University of Denver Law School. Initially a public defender, he is now in private practice in Denver. Matthew is married and has two children.

To the NRC and beyond

After his nine years in the Navy, Hoffman returned to school in 1979 to pursue a nuclear engineering degree, attending North

Adam (left) and Jefferson Hoffman

Hoffman's vision for ANS

Hoffman believes that his vision for the American Nuclear Society can be achieved by the implementation of an ambitious 12-step plan that he has been working on since taking office as the society's vice president/president-elect in June 2012. The plan consists of the 12 initiatives listed below, all designed to create new energy for making ANS a more vital and relevant professional society.

Initiative One: *Strategic plan implementation/integration*
- Manage strategic plan implementation/integration
- Ensure that all ANS constituent units support and integrate the plan consistently
- Create goals and other metrics for each initiative under the plan
- Drive ANS financial sustainability through the strategic plan

Initiative Two: *Membership development*
- "15 by 15": 15 000 members by 2015
- Open ANS to *all* nuclear science and technology (NS&T) professionals
- Consider incorporating *all* local section members into national as a unique level of national membership
- Create new membership categories and dues structures as necessary to attract all NS&T professionals
- Enhance membership experience through offerings/value

Initiative Three: *Advance Special Committee on ANS/Integration Oversight*
- Expand concept to other constituent groups (e.g., reactor vendors, suppliers)
- Leverage possible coordination of ANS events with other organizations

Initiative Four: *Strengthen relations with government officials and entities*

Initiative Five: *Improve ANS's operations and performance*

Initiative Six: *Support fundraising efforts for Center for Nuclear Science and Technology Information*

Initiative Seven: *Improve ANS finances*
- Identify and establish new revenue streams
- Reduce and maintain overall costs
- Establish sustainability of ANS

Initiative Eight: *Expand member participation*
- Create a clear path for all members to participate in leadership and governance: national committees, professional divisions, local sections, student sections, standards working groups

Initiative Nine: *Enhance international relevance, influence, and perception*
- Support ANS globally

Initiative Ten: *Improve meetings and program content*
- Create a task force (include the Program Committee chair and the director of meetings) to conduct an evaluation and make recommendations within 60 days for improving meeting content
- Professional Development Coordination Committee to make recommendations for enhancements and improvements within 60 days

Initiative Eleven: *Implement strategic communications plan*
- Increase and improve external communications
- Increase and improve internal communications
- Fully engage membership

Initiative Twelve: *Make ANS the "society of choice" for all NS&T professionals*

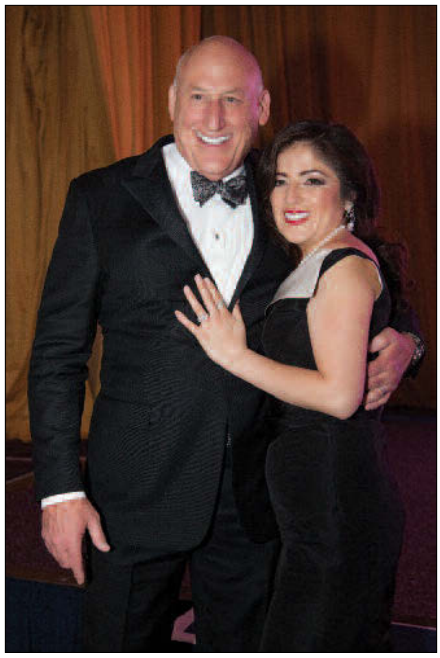
Carolina State University in Raleigh, N.C. But once again, he was forced to leave before graduating, this time due to the financial concerns of his growing family. (Hoffman would finally get his degree—a bachelor's in nuclear engineering and technology—in 2010, from Excelsior College, in New York.) He was employed by Tracor Inc. in 1980–1981 to provide technical engineering support to Naval Sea Systems Command.

In September 1981, Hoffman left Tracor to go to work for the Nuclear Regulatory Commission. "I had always wanted to work in the civil nuclear industry, especially in the regulation of it," Hoffman said. "So, obviously, the NRC was a very exciting opportunity for me. I went through oral examinations by a board of senior NRC officials, took an engineer-in-training exam, was given an oral examination by the NRC training board, and was found to have the knowledge, background, experience, expertise, and education equivalent to having a bachelor's degree in nuclear engineering." At the NRC, Hoffman worked in a group responsible for reviewing applications for low-power and full-power licenses and issuing safety evaluations, licenses, and technical specifications in the years following the Three Mile Island-2 incident.

In 1985, Hoffman left the NRC and formed EXCEL Services Corporation, located in Rockville, Md., in order to address what he perceived as the need to balance safety and performance/cost issues in a manner that would improve the overall safety and performance of nuclear power facilities. "At the time, there was not a lot being done in that arena," Hoffman said, "and I thought it would be interesting to do it." (His company, he insists, was the first in the United States to be named EXCEL, predating the Microsoft product.)

Hoffman describes his firm as "an international nuclear engineering company that specializes in regulatory and operational initiatives that enhance safety, improve performance, and reduce costs of operating nuclear facilities." Over the past 28 years, he noted, EXCEL has done business with virtually every U.S. nuclear utility and every nuclear plant and enrichment facility in the United States. The company is also currently working on projects in 21 countries, as well as with the International Atomic Energy Agency and the World Nuclear Association, among other organizations.

Hoffman has also made sure that EXCEL maintains a close relationship with ANS. "Essentially everyone in my company is a member of ANS," he said. "I'm very proud of that. We're all committed to and supportive of it." Hoffman is also proud that for the past 21 years, EXCEL has been a gold sponsor or above for each of ANS's two yearly national meetings. In addition, the firm has been the single largest exhibitor at ANS's Nuclear Technology Expos since



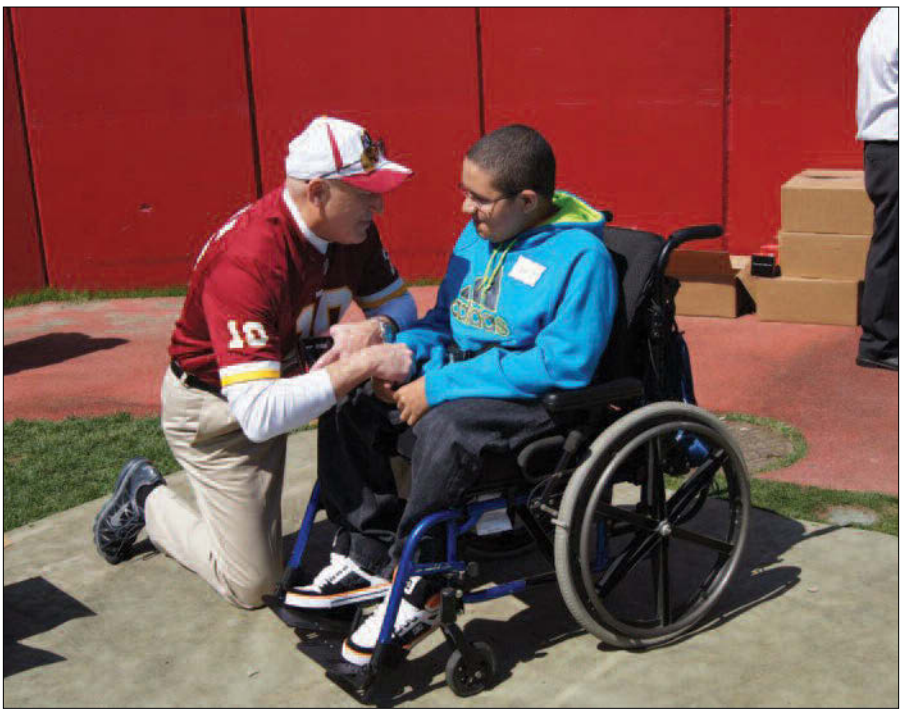
Hoffman speaking at the 2013 Washington Humane Society Bark Ball, and (above right) with Johanna Geber at the event.

1992 and sponsors essentially all of the society's student and young member programs and activities.

Hoffman's own close ties with ANS can be readily seen by his sustained participation in a variety of activities and initiatives over the years (he's been a member since 1984), including service on the board of directors and the Finance, International, and Public Policy Committees. He has also chaired the Professional Divisions Committee, the Membership Committee, and the Special Committee on Young Member Development, among others. "Between my travels for ANS and for the company," Hoffman said, "I'm out of the office over 50 percent of the time."

Outside the workplace

The time Hoffman devotes to his company and to ANS (80-plus hours per week, he estimates), does not allow much time for a personal life. He is, however, engaged to be married to "an extraordinary lady," Johanna Geber, who was born in Ecuador but has been a U.S. citizen for almost 10 years. They share a number of interests, including dancing, concern for the welfare of animals (they have three rescue pit bulls—Katie, Leia, and Michael), the same TV shows, *Star Trek* movies, and sports. Johanna currently works part time as an executive assistant for EXCEL, and she spends much of the rest of her time in the service of the Washington Humane Society, caring for animals in need, and taking care of the home she and Hoffman share with her two teenage nephews, for whom she has become the legal guardian. She is active in many charitable activities and with the Washington Redskins organization.



Hoffman chatting with one of the children at a Muscular Dystrophy Association event

Hoffman is also deeply involved in a number of charitable activities. He is on the board of directors of the Washington Humane Society, the Muscular Dystrophy Association, and the Multiple Sclerosis Society. "I believe in giving back to the community through charities and doing one's part," he said. "To paraphrase Luke 12:48, 'From him to whom much is given, much is expected.' To me, that means if God has been good to you, his expectation is that you will give something back every opportunity you have. So I have essentially lived my life doing that and have taught my children to do the same. I also try to ensure that I do that through the company."

It's clear that Hoffman throws himself wholeheartedly into virtually everything he does, especially his work on behalf of ANS. With that kind of enthusiasm and a little bit of luck, it is very likely that his vision for the society will carry over to future years.

"I am aware of all the challenges that the American Nuclear Society is facing," Hoffman said, "but I'm encouraged by the extraordinary people within the society to address them—staff, the board, and active members. We will be moving from discussion to action. I have a personal sense of urgency. If not now, when? My vision is to create new energy for making ANS a more vital and relevant professional society for all nuclear science and technology professionals." NN