

ORSSAB Vice Chair Says Board Can Be a Vehicle for Moving Projects Forward

“It’s a good time to be a member of ORSSAB because there are a lot of big issues, but not a lot of clear answers,” says board Vice Chair Kevin Westervelt. “There are also questions about sufficient budget allocations from DOE Headquarters to do the work that needs to be done.”

Kevin was talking about some of the technically challenging jobs facing the DOE Oak Ridge EM Program, things like the final takedown of the K-25 Building at ETTP; the removal of fuel salts from the Molten Salt Reactor; the Building 3019/ Uranium-233 Downblending Project; contamination detected in Melton Valley groundwater; demolition of surplus buildings at Y-12 National Security Complex and ORNL and any residual contamination, particularly mercury, which may be in the soil underneath.

“Maybe we, as a board, can be the vehicle to encourage DOE, EPA, and TDEC to be moving together in setting priorities for Oak Ridge.”

Kevin has been a member of ORSSAB since July 2006. “I learned about the board through newspaper articles I’d seen, and I’d been involved with work going on at K-25 and knew the board was involved in the EM arena. I’d taken all of the graduate courses in environmental engineering at the University of Tennessee, and I saw this as a way to put that education to use.”

Since joining the board Kevin has served as the chair of the Public Outreach Committee and in FY 2010 was elected board vice chair, now in his second term in that position.

Kevin is a native of the northwest Indiana area, Merrillville to be specific, which he says is an Indiana suburb of Chicago. He attended Purdue University earning a bachelor’s degree in civil structural engineering. After graduating he went to work for the Sargent and Lundy engineering firm working on power plant design and construction.



ORSSAB Vice Chair Kevin Westervelt in his Mesa Associates office in West Knoxville.

In the mid ‘80s he was promoted as a field supervisor of power plants. “After a tour of duty of about three years at a plant in downstate Illinois, in 1988 I was sent down to the TVA-operated plant at Watts Bar where I worked as a consultant on the operational readiness review team. I did that until the plant was fuel loaded and operational. I had been here eight years, liked the area and had the opportunity to join Mallia Engineering in Knoxville in 1996, and then I joined Mesa Associates in 2004.”

He currently is a structural department head for Mesa in charge of civil and structural engineering and architecture for government and industrial projects.

Since joining the board he has been encouraged by the active participation of members. “I’m glad to see more members stepping up,” he said. “I think we were relying too much on a few key people. On any topic we had just a few who would ask penetrating questions. In the last year or so it’s become more balanced with more people taking an active role.

“But I’m also seeing some frustration on the major issues like mitigating groundwater and surface water contamination from uranium in Bear Creek Burial Grounds and finishing the demolition of K-25, especially in light of technetium-99 contamination in some of the sections. I’m not sure anyone really knows the schedule and cost to finish some of these projects.”

In his off time from Mesa and board work Kevin likes to write. He’s been a sports writer and general columnist for the Farragut Press Enterprise. He’s currently fleshing out ideas on a book he’d like to write on growing up in the industrial Midwest and how that area has been affected by the loss of much of its industrial base.

He’s also coached youth sports like competitive baseball and AAU basketball.

Kevin and wife Lois have been married 25 years and have three children. Their oldest son Daniel is working on a doctorate in environmental engineering. Their daughter Mariel and younger son Brian are studying music and engineering respectively.