

DR. GARY BLANK

Notable achievement by an alumnus - By Joe Castanheiro



Dr Gary Blank

The largest professional association in the world is the IEEE (Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers). It has over 430,000 members in 190 countries and over 200,000 members in the U.S.A.

Alumnus Gary Blank was elected IEEE-USA President in 2014.

The President is a volunteer position, and Gary follows in the footsteps of earlier Presidents and leaders like Thomas Edison, Alexander Graham Bell, Albert Einstein, Marconi, Westinghouse, De Forest, and many others. This is, of course, quite an accomplishment.

Gary attended St. Mary's R.C. School. He was skipped from Third Standard to Fourth Standard (taught by Mr. Barry). His father worked for the firm, J. P. Santos, and was transferred to manage their store in.

Suddie, Essequibo. The family moved to Suddie when Gary was in Fifth Standard

In 1949, a year later, at the age of 10, Gary won a Government County Scholarship. It paid tuition and books for 5 years at St. Stanislaus College. Because of serious illness and repeated abdominal surgeries for peritonitis, he missed almost the entire year in 2A, being present for less than one month. He studied at home and, although he passed the exams at the end of the school year, Fr. Scannell advised him to stay in 2A instead of advancing to 3A.

During the next 4 years, 1950 to 1954 (the Form Masters being Mr. Marques in 2A, Mr. Laydoo in 3A, Fr. Marques in L4A, and Fr. Gill in U4A), Gary placed first in class 10 times in 12 terms.

His family immigrated into the USA in 1954. Because of strict visa quotas, only five members of the family of six were allowed to enter the USA. Being the oldest child (15 years old), Gary was left behind for several months with a relative in Georgetown, awaiting a US visa. He finally joined his family in October.

He had been accepted for admission by 3 universities, but he arrived too late for the start of the 1954-55 academic year at an American university. He had no choice but to spend the rest of the school year in a US high school. Because of his St. Stanislaus advanced background, there were very few courses available. He finished the school year in the high school and, as the result of a competitive examination, won an Ingersoll Foundation scholarship which paid his tuition, books, and living expenses for the next four years at Illinois Institute of Technology, one of the top engineering universities in the USA.

He started there in 1955. He graduated with a B.Sc. in electrical engineering in 1959 at the age of 20, and won a Kaiser Foundation Fellowship which paid his tuition, books, and living expenses for one year to pursue his M.Sc. in electrical engineering at the University of Idaho. He completed the degree requirements including publishing his research thesis at 21.

He then won a Ford Foundation Fellowship which paid his expenses for the next 3 years to pursue his doctorate at the University of Wisconsin. He completed the requirements for his Ph.D., including the publication of his research thesis, in 1963. He was recognized then as the youngest individual ever to receive a doctorate degree in engineering at the university.

Over the next few years, Gary varied his professional activities between being a university professor of electrical and electronics engineering and working in industry. He has been very active in aerospace and biomedical engineering. He has presented many seminars in Canada, Jamaica, Austria, Brazil, the Netherlands, and the USA.

Using what he learned from Fr. Earle, Gary coached his daughters' and sons' soccer teams. One of the teams he coached won the California State Championship and California State Cup in 1973, and another one of his teams accomplished the same in 1976.

He had the pleasure of meeting and visiting Fr. Feeny when he, his wife, and one of their daughters visited Guyana in 1988. In an unplanned surprise visit to the Sacred Heart Church rectory, Gary found and not only thanked Fr. Feeny for his inspiration and outstanding teaching he had done for Gary, but also let him know that he had adopted Father's successful methods in teaching complex scientific material.

Fr. Feeny thanked them for the visit, expressing that it was especially satisfying to have an old boy come back to thank him. Fr. Feeny appeared to be in good health, very alert, smiling the way he always did, and very clever in his conversation and humour. They said goodbye, and Fr. Feeny walked them to the corner to get a taxi. Fr. Feeny died that night in his sleep. It seemed as if he had been waiting for such a visit before he died.

Gary and his wife, Bonnie, have been married for 56 years. They live in Plato Center, Illinois, and have 4 children, 11 grandchildren and 7 great grandchildren.

Reference: [Toronto Saints News & Views, March, 2016](#)