



Look Who's a D.GE

Tom Witherspoon, Ph.D., P.E., L.S., D.GE, M.ASCE



TOM WITHERSPOON

Tom Witherspoon wears many hats: he is a licensed professional engineer, land surveyor, irrigator, sanitarian, geoscientist, structural repair specialist, certified foundation repair specialist, structural engineer, and diplomat, geotechnical engineering.

He founded S&W Foundation Contractors in 1986 (*tomwitherspoon.com*), which was recognized as one of the fastest-growing private companies in 1991 and 1992 by Inc. 500™.

Witherspoon has more than 40 years of residential and commercial construction and engineering experience. His doctoral research was the first of its kind to evaluate and assess remedial piling and piling systems used to repair foundations. This research has improved knowledge of foundation underpinning systems, helping homeowners and contractors to properly assess remedial designs.

He received his bachelor's degree in civil engineering from Southern Methodist University in 1971, his master's degree in management and administrative science from the University of Texas at Dallas, and his PhD from the University of Texas at Arlington in 2006.

He has served as a member of the following associations: ASCE, ASPE, ASPG, SEAOT, ADSC (as past president and a member of the board of directors), FRA (president), and NAWSRC

board member. He is often asked to speak to these organizations, as well as to DFI, Lorman, World of Concrete, ConExpo (ENR), and the Foundation Repair Association.

Witherspoon owns two U.S. patents — Soil Stabilization and Belling Tool — and he has published two books — *Residential Foundation Performance* (2000) and *Infrastructure: Evaluation, Maintenance & Repair* (2008).

He has been married to his high school sweetheart, Sandra, for 44 years and has two children, Stephen and Mary-Jac.

He is a five-time Texas state champion in Olympic weightlifting (open division), and for three years, (1990, 2000, 2014) he was the Pan American masters weightlifting champion.

What class did you enjoy the most while in school?

Deep Foundation Design.

What was your favorite project?

My doctoral dissertation – Load Capacity Testing of Residential Underpinning Systems in Expansive Clay, 2006.

What item did you always want to have?

An Olympic gold medal. (It never happened.)

What's your favorite song and artist?

Harper Valley PTA by Jeannie C. Riley.

What's your favorite movie or television show?

Big Bang Theory.

Where did you spend most of your childhood, and what was it like for you growing up there?

I grew up in a town of 160 people, nine miles east of Ferris, TX. I spent my childhood roaming the hills and hunting and digging for arrowheads and fossils. I spent much time building everything from diving boards for the stock tank to little cars that I had my younger brother test drive.

When did you realize that you wanted to study civil engineering, and what were the key factors in your decision to become a civil engineer?

I came to the realization in sixth grade; I wanted to be outdoors and build things.

How do you feel about the state of civil engineering and the profession as it is today?

I will be 66 years old on February 1 and cannot fathom ever retiring. I love what I do. I don't feel like I ever work, but I do put in a lot of time in my profession. I plan to work until I can't walk.

What do you feel are the biggest challenges on the horizon for the profession?

We need to attract younger people to our profession. To do that, we have to show them what I see, which is the most rewarding profession you can pursue. We have to hold our engineers up as role models and heroes. Society depends upon us solving problems, and if we are good, we can love our job

and be well rewarded for it.

Do you have a message about specialty certification which you would like professional engineers to be aware?

We live in an age of specialization, and the Diplomate certification/designation is recognition that we have reached a level of competence that makes us stand out.

Why did you apply for D.GE certification?


I appreciate the level of competence that this certification exhibits and the responsibility to not only society, but to our customers.

How was the application process?

I found it fair and complete.

What are some of your personal hobbies and interests?

I still compete in Olympic-style weightlifting, which makes me continue to train with young people who are 40+ years younger than me. In August of 2015, I won the World Cup in weightlifting in the 65-69 age group and the 94 kg class.

I have a ranch in Van Alstyne, TX, where I raise Red Angus cattle. I love mentoring the younger generation and find their interest fascinating because of the world they have come into. I fill in two times a year for our minister by delivering a sermon to the congregation. Past sermons included "God, the World's Greatest Engineer," during which I provided the geotechnical and structural engineering background behind the failure of the walls of Jericho. 

For the complete interview, please visit geoprosessionals.org.

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