

John Golbeck (2017)



Vice President: 2020-2021

President: 2021-2022

Dec 11, 2019: Renewable Energy in Germany

Mar 12, 2024: The Iron Furnaces of Pennsylvania

I grew up in the near south side of Milwaukee in a neighborhood of 1st and 2nd generation German and Polish immigrants. My father ran a mom-and-pop grocery store that specialized in German sausages, meats, and cheeses. I fondly recall accompanying my father at 6 am every Saturday morning to the 3rd ward to buy eggs and vegetables from Italian wholesalers, to a dry goods distributor downtown to buy canned items, and then back to the store where I marked prices and neatly placed the items on shelves. I especially liked Fridays because we would sell fresh yellow perch and smoked chubs to the Polish Catholic population, but the best part was bringing the unsold fish home and enjoying them over the weekend. I went to one of the two inner city high schools but I had the good fortune of having a biology teacher who encouraged me to apply for an NSF-based 'high school science institute' designed for students between their junior and senior year. This was the era of Sputnik and government money was available to encourage students to study science and engineering. As neither my parents nor any of my relatives had been to college, spending the summer at Indiana University was, to put it mildly, a revelation. I enrolled at Valparaiso University where I took a B.S. in chemistry and I worked in a meat packing plant for four summers to afford the tuition. I then proceeded to Indiana University where I worked under Anthony San Pietro to earn a Ph.D. in biological chemistry. At IU, I had the excellent fortune of meeting my spouse, Carolyn Wilhelm, in a class on protein biochemistry; we were married after a 6-week whirlwind courtship, and it lasted. It will be 50 years in 2025.

This was the time of the space shuttle and NASA was looking for mission specialists who had a doctorate in a physical science, a pilot's license, and it would help to be employed in a defense industry. As I learned to fly in graduate school and I was doing postdoctoral studies in biophysics with Bessel Kok at Martin Marietta Laboratories, I thought I was all set. Except that I found that didn't meet the height requirement because I was too tall. After nearly a decade as an industrial scientist, I returned to academia, holding faculty positions at Portland State University, the University of Nebraska, and The Pennsylvania State University, where I remained for 25 years. I have taken sabbatical leaves at Rensselaer Polytechnic University in Troy, NY, the Centre d'Etudes Nucléaires de Saclay in Paris, the Freie Universität Berlin, the Humboldt University in Berlin, and Brock University in St. Catharines, ON. Over the past 50 years, I edited two books and published 247 peer reviewed scientific papers, and I mentored 20 Ph.D. students and 10 M.S. students. Although I retired in 2022, I continue to do research and publish in what are collaborative arrangements. I am a member of International Society of Photosynthesis Research, for which I served over 15 years in the positions of Secretary and Treasurer. My outside interests include amateur radio (callsign W3JHG), helium picoballoon global circumnavigation, and photography (<https://quantumphotography.godaddysites.com>). Carolyn and I are enjoying our retirement years by traveling on Amtrak in the US and ViaRail in Canada. I was recruited as a member of Torch Club in 2017 by Roy Hammerstedt and I have had the pleasure of serving in the positions of vice-president and president in 2020/1 and 2021/2, respectively.

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