

# Charley Jewett

Charley Jewett embodies everything about NASPD. As a past president, he has a long history with and many friends in NASPD. He also has enough colorful pipe stories to fill at least a couple of books.

Charley was born and raised in Houston, Texas - the fourth of six children. Summers were spent swimming and sailing on Galveston Bay with his grandparents, brothers and sisters. "My life-long love of sailing began aboard my 14' Sunfish. The Bay was and remains my favorite place in the Great State of Texas." The Jewetts lived in Braes Heights, a neighborhood in what was then referred to as Southwest Houston. "Houston was a small Southern city in the 50's and 60's -

*Thanks (once again!) to the NASPD, a professional relationship evolved into a great friendship, and that has certainly been the case with Charley Jewett and me. We met in the late '70s (Yikes!) at an NASPD conference. Charley headed the pipe division of Proler International, and my almost new and very small company was interested in gaining Proler as a supplier to us for structural pipe. Charley was then as he is now; professional, friendly and always willing to find a way to make a deal happen. Despite my modest purchases, he made me feel like Pittsburgh Pipe was a Tier 1 customer of Proler, and my relationship with Proler, thanks to Charley, helped our company grow. In addition to sharing a passion for the pipe business, we quickly determined that we shared a passion for storytelling, and our business relationship soon became a great personal friendship as well. In ensuing years, Charley and I maintained our friendship and our business relationship, and my company has been a customer of Charley at other pipe companies he has been affiliated with (all of them NASPD members!) including Pipe and Tube Supplies, Inc. where he is Director of Sales. Charley is a great guy with great integrity, and he is a great representative of our industry.*

Joseph Bergfeld - Pittsburgh Pipe

a place where everyone knew everyone, or so it seemed to me as a boy." The Jewett family was very involved in Houston civic and social affairs, and it seemed the whole city shopped

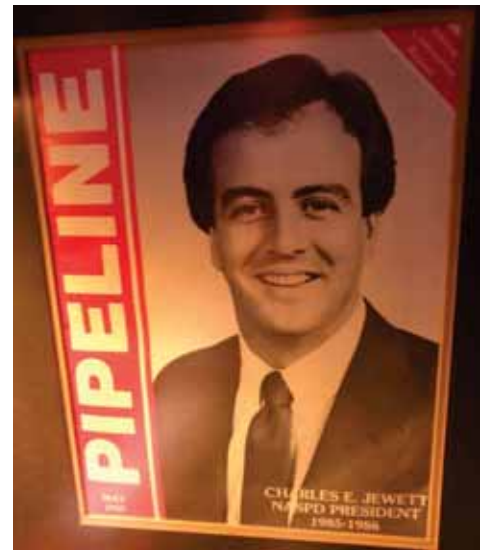
at his grandfather's clothing store. Although he's been gone for decades, people still ask if Charley is any relation to Harry Jewett. "My grandfather taught me the value of service to community, by example. He freely gave his time and treasure to Shriners Burns Institute in Galveston, Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo, Heart Fund, Houston Chamber of Commerce and many more philanthropic endeavors. He was an enormous and positive influence on me."

Charley received his primary education within the Houston Public Schools system. At Bellaire High School, he entered the Distributive Education Program, a work/study retail marketing curriculum. It seemed a natural pursuit considering the Jewett family retail ventures. After graduating High School, Charley headed toward the East Texas town of Nacadoches. There at Stephen F. Austin University (SFA), he pursued a BA Political Science and Economics. Friends, fraternity and campus politics were his passions. He became involved in Student Government and was elected Sophomore Class President, Junior Class Favorite, and Chief Justice of the Student Supreme Court. Along with those posts, being the President of his fraternity were early leadership opportunities. "I loved the challenge of bringing divergent groups together to gain consensus. College and I got along just fine." He also married Joanna Ferrell (the prettiest girl at SFA) in 1977. And for thirty years they were happily married, making their home in the Houston neighborhood where Charley grew up. "We raised three amazing, smart, and accomplished children - Katy, Andrew and Julie. The best job I have ever had or will ever have is being their Dad."

His first foray into the pipe business materialized in the form of Summer job while attending college. The company was Petro Pipe & Supply in Houston, Texas. Petro Pipe was a part of a larger company (Texas Iron & Metal) in the local scrap business. Charley worked in the yard, loading trucks and moving pipe via gin-pole truck. Soon thereafter, a promotion to Inventory Clerk was eagerly accepted. And it meant a move inside the air-conditioned office trailer - a coveted position at a Houston pipe yard in the Texas Summer. Charley fondly recalls those



Above: Charley Jewett during 2019 NASPD Convention in New Orleans  
Below: Charley featured on cover of Pipeline magazine in 1985!



three Summers at Petro Pipe; the place where "I first got rust in my blood".

After earning his college degree and a brief stint in law school, Charley decided to let go of family plans that envisioned him as a lawyer and went looking for a job. When the headhunter noted his "pipe experience", an interview was set up with Proler International Corp., a Houston based, NYSE listed metals company. Proler had an opening for an Inventory Control Clerk in the Pipe Division and he was hired. Before long he

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moved into Sales and, “porque el habla Espanol”, Charley was sent to South America on a 30” water line project. After six months back and forth to Caracas, the Manager of the Pipe Division moved on and Charley assumed that role. At Proler, Charley learned the pipe business in earnest. With scrap supplier relationships with steel mills worldwide, the company had entrees to buy secondary products from those mills, large diameter pipe among them. That entree would open a large O.D. line of business to Charley that has spanned forty-five years. “It is no coincidence that I am with a large diameter structural pipe company today, as have so very many things in my life, this has come full circle.”

It was at this point that Charley was introduced to his first real pipe mentor. Izzie Proler, then President and Chairman of the Board, took a



Charley Jewett takes the podium as NASPD President

very active interest in Charley. “I had the honor of sitting across his desk for almost a year, listening and learning how he ran this very large and very successful business,” says

Charley. The Prolers invented the automobile shredder and installed them all over America and Europe. In business for over fifty years, they grew a local scrap merchant enterprise into an international corporation producing “Prolerized Scrap” - the feedstock of choice for electric arc steel making. “At what I now realize was a very tender age, I had an amazing opportunity to literally sit

across from a giant in the steel business.” Izzie was smart, gracious, and eager to teach Charley all he could absorb. “He was my mentor, another father really. I will never forget the things he taught me.” At 27 years old, Charley was appointed Vice-President of Proler International. Although sitting as a freshly cast VP (one of only five) was a daunting honor, his colleagues welcomed him with open arms.

In 1985, he was presented an opportunity to join forces with a great customer, dear friend, pipe distributor, World’s BEST joke teller, and oft-proclaimed “Queen of Pipe”, Dottie Lytle. It was the year we lost Izzie Proler, and the timing was right for Charley to move on. So he, Dottie and another partner active in the Holland pipe business, formed Houston Pipe International Inc. (HPII) as a stocking distributor of large diameter structural and prime pipe. Based in his hometown, HPII was active in United States and South American markets, distributing pipe to projects and dealers for half a dozen years. During the first year of this new distribution business venture, Charley was serving as President of the NASPD. The association was instrumental to HPII networking efforts, many of which were conducted at the hotel bar during NASPD conventions! In 1990, trade issues effectively blocked the importation of European secondary pipe and their Dutch partner lost USA distribution. Dottie took the situation as a retirement cue and Charley subsequently spent the better part of that year winding down the business, selling inventories, closing yards and joint ventures and mill contracts; eventually working himself out of a job. The liquidation process was overwhelming and he had not devoted much thought to what might come next.

HPII officially closed up shop on a Friday. The next morning, Charley was at home cleaning his pool, when the phone rang. It was Moises Woldenberg, “I knew Moises and his father Jaime through the NASPD and business in Mexico.” Moises explained that his family had put together the winning proposal to take Tubacero (Mexico’s largest welded pipe manufacturer) private. Having been Tubacero’s primary distributor both at Proler and HPII, Charley was well versed in their business operations. Moises wondered if he might be interested in exploring Tubacero’s viability in the global pipeline markets. Cleaning his own pool certainly wouldn’t provide for his family, so Charley dropped the skimmer and took Moises up on the offer immediately. After months of study, collaboration and writing, Charley presented a business plan to Tubacero’s Board of Directors that envisaged a US based, wholly owned subsidiary trading company conducting Tubacero’s business in non-Spanish speaking countries. The Board voted to accept the business plan and Tubacero International Corp. was born. For his efforts, Charley was awarded the leadership position in the new company. For the next dozen years he traveled all over the World, promoting Tubacero as the world

*I have know Charley for close to 40 years. I have always considered Charley a good friend. In all my years of dealing with Charley he has always been very honest with describing pipe and its condition. Charley has a real working knowledge of the pipe industry. The only thing he does not know about is computers. The other day he said he needed to take some computer classes, I told him We were to Old to do that. If I were looking for a man to run my business Charley would be my man.*

Ricky Spriggs - S & S Pipe & Supply Inc.

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class line pipe manufacturer that we all know today. It was an exciting time to be involved in Mexico trade - NAFTA gave birth to the world's largest trading block and myriad opportunities for cross-border commerce. Charley was fortunate to be involved in the NAFTA legislation process and worked alongside government and industry leaders in Washington toward its adoption. He participated in the treaty signing ceremonies at the White House and was a guest of President Clinton for his second inauguration. "At one White House reception, I met in the Lincoln Library with all four then living US Presidents; Clinton, Bush Sr., Ford, and Carter. It was a humbling experience that I will never forget."

Tubacero eventually decided to consolidate all commercial activities in Monterrey. Tubacero International closed and Charley veered off into a non-pipe segment of the steel industry - rebar. With Izzie Proler's comments about the rebar business ringing in his ears, "it's a whore's market", Charley embarked on a different journey over the next decade. Recalling Izzie's view of the rebar business Charley said "Boy was he right!". At the end of that endeavor, he needed a break and took some time to rebuild his Hurricane Ike damaged home on Galveston Bay. While working on the house he contemplated what might come next. As it is wont, fate opened new chapter and this time selling pipe would not be the operative function. Upon learning of his Mother's cancer diagnosis, Charley suggested she move in. "The Bay was a big part of our family life growing up-it's where I learned to swim and sail, and ski. And I suggested Mom come back to the Bay to recuperate. She eagerly accepted and for the next three years I had the honor of parenting my parent. It was a time I would not trade for anything."

When his mother's needs required a higher level of care, Charley decided to un-retire and get back to work. Much had changed in the pipe business during his ten year absence. When the headhunter sent him on an interview with Pipe & Tube Supplies (PTSI) in Pearland, TX, he was in for a big surprise - primarily that PTSI was in the large diameter structural business, in a very big way! As everything comes full circle, Charley found himself at PTSI selling large O.D. Mills he

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*I've had the pleasure of knowing Charley for a very long time. He, who has a privileged memory, has reminded me that the first time we met each other was in the late seventies, when he was with Proler International and buying steel pipe from Tubacero in Mexico, where I have been serving in the last 53 years of my life.*

*Our professional and personal relationship became much stronger in 1990 when Charley organized and developed Tubacero International Corp., based in Houston, Tx., as a wholly owned subsidiary of Tubacero. He became President of the first one, and served for over nine years, developing new markets and gaining new acceptances for the Company's products, enlarging supplier bases and leading efforts to expand the Company's product line through various joint ventures affiliations. He served Tubacero with loyalty, dedication and integrity, and his leadership is still missing.*

*My wife and I have a great fondness for both Charley and his lovely wife, Joana. They were always very kind to my family and attended my children's weddings in Monterrey, Mexico. Despite the distance, we had the opportunity to see each other and enjoy great dinners in Houston on several occasions. I will never forget the support Charley gave my son Adrian and his friends, being still young and on vacation in Houston. They were assaulted and their car was stolen. What an experience!*

Alfonso Benitez - Tubacero, S. de RL de CV

*I have known Charley for nearly 50 years. He is a good friend and a valuable, respected, and knowledgeable business ally. Charley has had a very interesting and successful career. Charley is one of those rare individuals who has integrity, style and lots of class. He is an asset to both the steel pipe industry and the NASPD.*

Robert Jacobson - R B Jacobson, Inc.

heads turned to see who these 'kids' were. Admittedly, we likely looked a bit lost." The next thing they knew, Dwight Byrum - Bakersfield Pipe, extended a warm invitation to join their table. Not knowing Dwight (or anyone else in their group) did not matter for very long. Following introductions around the table, the Byrum's took them in tow for introductions around the whole room. "That was our debut at the NASPD - inclusive, welcoming, hospitable. And that camaraderie has not changed in the 40 plus years of my participation in the association." After a ten year absence from the pipe business and the NASPD, Charley attended a meeting in Lake Tahoe several years ago representing PTSL. His reception was overwhelming. "Old friends greeted me with variations of the question, 'Damn, Charley Jewett - where the hell have you been? Sit down - let's talk!'" And just like that, I was back home after too long an absence."

had dealt with for so long, like Tubacero and Stupp, made the product and he sold it to customers and friends that he had known for over forty years. "I was back at home and see myself working in the industry that I know and love for many years to come. While the Bay still calls me, I'm hardly ready for retirement!"

The first NASPD event Charley attended was the 1977 Convention Year at LaCosta Resort and Spa in Carlsbad, California. He and his wife, Joana, were excited about the prospects of a business trip to the famous oasis but frankly did not know what to expect. The pair were in their late 20's and at that point, the only conventions they had attended were college student gatherings. The episode that Charley recalls most vividly was a seated dinner affair in a ballroom on the property. They donned their best duds and walked in to a sea of people they didn't know. "Joanna was radiant in a long sleek black dress and white fox fur and



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NASPD hosted a Houston event in the 90's at the Houstonian Hotel & Convention Center. One night, a group gathered in the hotel lounge. There was a piano in the bar and Dottie Lytle (who sang for 25 years with the Houston Symphony) appropriately took center stage. When the hotel piano player took a break, "Big Mike" McConnahey (father of Rooster and Mathew) decided to take his place in front of the ivories. Big Mike pulled up the piano bench as Dottie hoisted herself atop of the grand piano's closed lid. And so began a medley of tunes, topped off by a rousing rendition of Mexicali Rose. By the second verse the rest of the crowd had joined in. "We thought we were most entertaining although that assessment wasn't shared by the hotel staff. The Night Manager strongly suggested that we take our merry troupe elsewhere. Not to be deterred, the Swiss Chalet Restaurant and Lounge was a short drive down Woodway Road. And Big Mike and Dottie continued the concert there until long after closing time."

Charley gathers, "The NASPD embodied networking before there was networking. Pete and Jerry (with eager collaboration of their pipe friends) envisioned and pulled together a group of individuals with common interests, chief among them a venue that would facilitate the sharing of information. Networking - competitors, customers and vendors. All gathered together for a getaway that included business, social engagement and relaxation. It was a winning recipe then and it continues to work very well today. The NASPD's proof of concept is longevity."

Katy Jewett is a political consultant, traveling the USA managing Democratic campaigns, "perhaps some of my political aspirations rubbed off". Andrew Jewett is a Commercial Real Estate Broker in Houston, specializing in industrial properties. "Not a week goes by that he doesn't tell me of meeting someone we know in the pipe business. As I

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that the carrier waives any right to seek payment from you for freight.

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The bottom line is that, no matter your title, failing to be proactive here will cost you, eventually.

About the author: Alexis Foster is a commercial litigator at Gray Reed in Houston. She specializes in the steel industry and related legal matters including domestic and international business litigation. (afoster@grayreed.com). •

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previously conveyed, it really is a small town" Julie Jewett is a salesperson par excellence. Schooled in hospitality and restaurant management and trained by Disney, Julie sells produce to Dallas area fine dining establishments. "If you ever need a restaurant referral in the Metroplex, call Julie Jewett"

In 2017, Andrew and his beautiful, talented wife Jordan, introduced the world to Molly Elizabeth - Charley's first grandchild. "Just when I thought life couldn't get any better, this wonderful baby girl came into our world. Molly calls me 'Rocket', a name of unknown origin that I find completely appropriate. My new name is catching on and I like it. Any man who hails from The Space City would love to be called Rocket - I feel lucky to be that guy."



Charley Jewett: past NASPD President, pipe salesman, gifted story teller, business man, leader, father and most importantly Rocket.



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