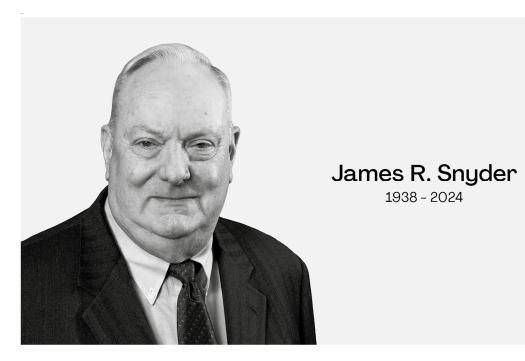# Founding PMI

James R. Snyder
1938 – 2024

A Fateful Snowstorm

It began with a heavy December snowstorm in Philadelphia, 1967. Jim was celebrating a deal at The Three Threes Restaurant, blocks away from City Hall. Ned Engman had sold an advanced piece of planning and scheduling software to Jim and his colleague Susan Gallagher, who led project planning at SK&F. The three found themselves stuck inside the restaurant as the snow raged on.

With time on their hands, the conversation turned to their common frustrations. They came to identify a common pain point: the lack of a clear, intuitive way to share information about some of the tools that were emerging for managing project-oriented work.

This wasn't a new line of conversation. Engman had been commiserating over this very topic with his friend and client Eric Jenett, then serving as the vice president of civil engineering at Brown & Root. Meanwhile, Snyder had himself been venting to his colleague Dr. J. Gordon Davis at the Georgia Institute of Technology.

As the snow continued falling, the three agreed that they should be the ones to finally tackle the communications logjam.

They didn't originally set out to plan a new professional organization, much less help pave the way for a globally recognized profession. Their original aims were much more modest. "We thought we'd have a conference, bring people together, start the sharing process, establish some communication channels and that would be the end of it."

They weren't sure what the next steps would hold, but agreed on one thing: they would next meet somewhere without snow! They settled on New Orleans.

That initial brainstorming meeting consisted of a small but passionate group that began to formalize the purpose and objectives of a seminar to be held on "Advanced Project Management Concepts", ultimately held at Georgia Tech University in October of 1969.

The founders left that event with a board of directors, 23 members, and a promise to do it all again next year. Jim was elected to serve as the first President of the nascent organization.

Those early years were anything but glamorous. Original dues for membership were $15 and Jim's dining room table served as the first "office."

As Jim put it, "We did things simply because we knew they needed to be done – volunteering our time to bring professionals together, publish resources, share knowledge, and strengthen the profession." That spirit of volunteerism would endure through the decades and all of the changes the organization underwent, ultimately planting the seeds for a global network of passionate volunteers unrivalled by virtually any other professional association.

Those first PMI leaders volunteered their time largely because they saw a need to share best practices in project planning and scheduling. In fact, the organization was nearly named the American Planning and Scheduling Society. But in time, the founders identified that the needs were much larger in scope – encompassing all things related to the emerging field of project management.

"PMI started as the solution to a problem. People in a new and growing profession, saddled with trying to understand project management, needed others in the same field with whom they could share ideas, test their theories and communicate their concepts. It was a case of right place, right time."

- Jim Snyder

Over those initial years, PMI primarily worked from annual event to annual event. The pace was slow and steady. "If we got one piece of mail a week, it was a big week," Snyder recounted.

But as more developing countries around the world with little project experience began to industrialize and business attitudes began shifting, PMI soon found itself in a challenging position – too small to hire full-time employees, growing too fast for the founders to quite handle. Jim had little idea of what he was taking on when he agreed to assume responsibility of the administration of the organization. His wife Ann stepped in to provide invaluable assistance and support. "Had it not been for the long hours she volunteered to PMI during those early days, we would have closed our doors," Jim said.

With two young children and a full plate of responsibilities, the Snyders ultimately brought on a part-time volunteer office assistant who became PMI's first real manager

when the organization upgrades to its first real office, located as Jim would memorably put it, "over the meat market and next to the bar."

Demand continued to spread and by the time the organization was a decade old in 1979, membership had increased tenfold – and the basis was firmly established for the organization to continue growing in scope and stature as it helped to firmly establish project management as a crucial strategic capability for organizations in every sector and corner of the globe.

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This personal recollection, augments the information on PMI in **_The Origins of Modern Project Management_** (page 16):
https://mosaicprojects.com.au/PDF_Papers/P050_Origins_of_Modern_PM.pdf