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Hispanic organization honors nuclear waste management leader

 *October 15, 2020*  *by Kristen Meub*

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Evaristo “Tito” Bonano (8800), senior manager for Sandia’s Nuclear Energy Fuel Cycle Program, has been honored for his achievements and leadership as a top engineer and researcher from the Hispanic community.

Tito received a Lifetime Achievement award, which was presented virtually at the 32nd annual Hispanic Engineer National Achievement Awards Conference (HENAAC), held from Oct. 5 to 9 by [Great Minds in STEM](#). Cyber assurance architect Angela “Ang” Rivas (9300) was also honored with a Luminary award. (Read about Ang’s achievements [here](#).)

To date, 43 Sandia employees have been recognized at HENAAC since 1994.

Throughout his 37-year career, Tito has focused on the safety-related issues of nuclear technology, nuclear waste management, and nuclear waste disposal, working to provide solutions for the safe disposal of highly radioactive nuclear waste. Early in his career, he worked as a researcher at Sandia and other institutions. He then became a small-business owner before coming back to Sandia to take on technical and managerial leadership roles.



Tito Bonano (8800), senior manager for Sandia’s Nuclear Energy Fuel Cycle Program, has received a Lifetime Achievement award from Great Minds in STEM. (Photo by Lonnie Anderson)

Leader of the Yucca Mountain license application

In 2006, the Department of Energy designated Sandia as the lead laboratory of the Yucca Mountain Project, which sought to permanently dispose of high-level radioactive waste and spent nuclear fuel from both commercial and national defense use. Tito was elected to lead the

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preparation of the portion of the license application that described the work of hundreds of engineers and scientists from multiple laboratories, universities, and private companies to demonstrate that spent nuclear fuel and high-level radioactive waste could be disposed of deep inside the Earth while protecting the health and safety of humans and the environment for tens of thousands of years.

“Having the opportunity to lead this critically important, complex effort and completing the license application in June 2008, which represented the culmination of over 30 years of work by hundreds of scientists and engineers from numerous organizations, is, without any doubt or reservation, the highlight of my professional career and an accomplishment that I will always be extremely proud of,” Tito said.

After the Nuclear Regulatory Commission accepted the license application, federal funding was withdrawn from Yucca Mountain in 2011 and the site has not progressed.

Overseeing Sandia’s Nuclear Energy Fuel Cycle Program

Tito is currently the senior manager for Sandia’s Nuclear Energy Fuel Cycle Program, where he oversees research in nuclear waste disposal while also directing programs in safety analysis for space launch missions, small modular reactors, advanced energy conversion systems, fuel cycle systems engineering and analysis, storage and transportation of nuclear waste, and advanced modeling and simulation.

“Tito’s visionary leadership has grown Sandia’s nuclear effort substantially despite a nationwide lull in nuclear power generation and nuclear waste disposal the past 10 years,” said Sandia Labs Director James Peery. “Tito has positioned Sandia as the nation’s — and arguably the world’s — premier nuclear waste disposal research organization, a trusted technical adviser to DOE, and a leading contributor to national and international nuclear waste disposal efforts in Australia; South Korea; at the International Atomic Energy Association in Vienna, Austria; and the Nuclear Energy Agency.”

Increasing the pipeline of Hispanic engineers

Tito also has worked to build partnerships with Hispanic-serving universities to increase the pipeline of Hispanic engineers to Sandia.

Tito says that throughout his career he learned much from others who mentored him, and he feels an obligation and a responsibility to share his experiences and lessons learned with those that will follow him.

“Knowledge transfer has become my passion at this point in my career, and there are four basic principles that have served me well personally and professionally that I want to share with the next generation of STEM professionals: have passion for and believe in what you do; always act with integrity regardless of the circumstances; never assume you know it all — respect and value the opinions of others; and always give credit to those you work with, for your accomplishments would not be possible without them,” Tito said.

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Beyond mentoring and sharing his own experiences, Tito has set up a formal knowledge transfer program at Sandia to ensure that scientific and analytical expertise is passed on from one generation of engineers to the next.

“Tito’s vision has resulted in the creation of a state-of-the-art knowledge management program at Sandia,” said Rod McCullum, senior director of decommissioning and used fuel for the Nuclear Energy Institute, in his recommendation letter. “His realization that continued government inaction will likely push the quest for a nuclear waste solution forward to yet another generation has led him to turn his dedication towards assuring that all of the scientific and analytical expertise that this generation has developed will remain available to those that follow. Eventually, the U.S. will solve its nuclear waste problem. It cannot be known whether or not the world will then truly appreciate the role that Tito had in making this possible.”

Tito was born and raised in Puerto Rico. He graduated from the University of Puerto Rico-Mayaguez with a degree in chemical engineering. He earned master’s and doctorate degrees in chemical engineering from Clarkson University, focusing on transport phenomena.

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