

# STEM SPOTLIGHT

## S. Michael Avanzi, P.E.

Gas Distribution/Transmission Engineer IV  
Memphis Light, Gas and Water

Bachelor of Science in Electrical Engineering  
Master of Business Administration  
Professional Engineer

Christian Brothers University (2003)  
Union University (2007)  
State of Tennessee (since 2008)



**Q** How did you select your college major?

**A** I chose Electrical Engineering as a major because of my strength in STEM subjects like Physics and Calculus. I'm also a very logical thinker and thrive on solving challenging problems.

**Q** What was the biggest influence in your selection of major/ career?

**A** The biggest influence in my choice of Electrical Engineering was my strong STEM background.

**Q** If you could go back to high school and select any elective course to take that would have better prepared you for college, what would it be?

**A** If I could go back to high school and take any course it would be a Computer Aided Design (CAD) or a Geographic Information Systems (GIS) class.

**Q** What is your favorite aspect of your job?

**A** My favorite aspect of my job is being in a leadership role in an engineering department because I get the best of both worlds: engineering and leadership. Being heavily involved in engineering, I get the opportunity to solve problems and work on challenging, meaningful assignments on a daily basis. I also have a strong leadership background from my previous jobs in high school and college, my positions in my fraternity in college and from my MBA. At MLGW, I've been in a lead position for over 6 years and have had the opportunity to rotate in a supervisor position for 25 months. Being in a leadership position presents its own set of challenges. I thoroughly enjoy working in a team setting and working with many different personality types. I thrive on helping others reach their potential.



**Q How do you/your company make a positive impact on society/our community?**

**A** This is one of the things that I really love about MLGW: its community involvement. Delivering safe, reliable and cost-effective utilities to our customers improves their quality of life and that is exactly what the 2600+ employees at MLGW strive to do on a daily basis. Some of the organizations that MLGW supports annually are United Way, Junior Achievement, Lifeblood, Special Olympics and the Food Bank. MLGW donates over \$1 million annually to the Memphis and Shelby County Community. Project Care has provided over 27 years of service to the community. It helps more than 120 customers in need each year by weatherizing homes and building wheelchair ramps for elderly and low-income customers. MLGW's Public Education Program allows the company to educate adults and children on the utility industry. Some components of the program include the Speakers Bureau, Business of Service Conference, Memphis Neighborhood Leaders Conference and the MLGW Ambassadors Program. MLGW also has the Plus-1 and Gift of Comfort programs to help customers in need of help paying their utility bills. Having been the Chair of the JEPE (Engineering) Committee in 2014, it has been my mission to get our engineers involved in the community. We have gotten heavily involved with the West TN Stem Hub, Girls Experiencing Engineering, and local Science Fair judging. We've also hosted the 2nd Annual MLGW A-Blazing Solar Car Race to present 3rd-8th graders with a fun STEM project to work on during their summer break.



**Q What's the most interesting thing you have been able to do in your professional career?**

**A** It is pretty much impossible for me to pick just one thing so I'll pick two. I've had the opportunity to be the Gas Division Capital Budget Key person and get a \$25 million capital budget approved by our executive staff for 4 years. Also, I've had the opportunity in 2014 to be MLGW's Chair of the JEPE Committee representing over 160 engineers at the company and working with all the new engineers that were hired at the company.

**Q What makes you get up each morning excited about your profession?**

**A** I have a great job that presents me the opportunity to work on challenging assignments on a daily basis that make a difference to our customers and the community in which I live. Working with other talented individuals and helping them to reach their potential drives me as well.

**Q What advice would you share with K-12 students who are considering your profession?**

**A** Stay humble and hungry to learn. Always step up and take on opportunities to work on challenging assignments and to get involved in volunteer/leadership activities in your school and community. Seek out high school co-op opportunities and get a job as soon as you're old enough to work. As much as it seems painful at the time, do your homework. Lastly, respect your parents and your teachers!