

# Focus on Alumni: Mark Vergnano

For alumnus Mark Vergnano, who has built an enviable 26-year career with chemical giant E.I. DuPont de Nemours Co., Inc., his UConn Chemical Engineering education honed his analytical acumen and helped him succeed in a career blending engineering and business leadership. “I believe that an engineering background gave me the advantage to approach problems in a very logical and disciplined way,” he remarked.

In June 2006, he was named Group Vice President of DuPont Safety & Protection after serving as Vice President and General Manager of DuPont Building Innovations since October 2005. DuPont Safety and Protection is a \$5.2 billion revenue business for DuPont and one of the fastest growing and most profitable sets of businesses in the company. It consists of five strategic business units: DuPont Advanced Fiber Systems, DuPont Nonwovens, DuPont Building Innovations, DuPont Chemical Solutions and DuPont Safety Resources. As Group Vice President, he oversees all aspects of the business including sales, marketing, technology, and operations at facilities located at 29 different sites throughout four continents. In his management position, Mr. Vergnano no longer practices engineering on a daily basis; nonetheless, he finds that the disciplined approach he learned as an engineer helps him solve complex strategic business issues.

Since 1980, when he first joined DuPont, Mr. Vergnano has moved five times and served in positions of increasing managerial authority. After earning his B.S. in Chemical Engineering, he began working as a process engineer in the former Fibers Department of DuPont located in Richmond, VA. He was involved in manufacturing and technical assignments for the Kevlar® and Tyvek® products while also earning his MBA through an executive program offered by Virginia Commonwealth University. Over the next decade, Mr. Vergnano and his wife, Betsy (formerly Elizabeth Reddington, CLAS '81), relocated to Wilmington, DE and then to Geneva, Switzerland, where

Mr. Vergnano served as marketing manager for Typar® carpet backings.

“My assignment in Switzerland was one of the highlights of my career from both a personal and professional perspective,” he said. Switzerland afforded the Vergnanos an idyllic place to raise children and to explore all of Europe. From a business perspective, Mr. Vergnano observed, “It was great learning how different both business and engineering practices are in Europe versus the U.S. Europe is not a homogeneous region...Each country has its own culture, including its own business and technology culture. It is important to understand the unique aspects of each country’s culture to succeed in business within that country.”

During his years in Switzerland, he was appointed European regional business manager with responsibility for all business activities for the Tyvek, Typar and Sontara® products. In 1996, the Vergnanos returned to the U.S., where Mr. Vergnano progressed through administrative roles overseeing global business for the Teflon® fiber, Nomex® and Tyvek/Typar products. He was appointed Vice President and General Manager of DuPont Nonwovens in 2003 and then appointed Vice President and General Manager of DuPont Building Innovations in 2005.

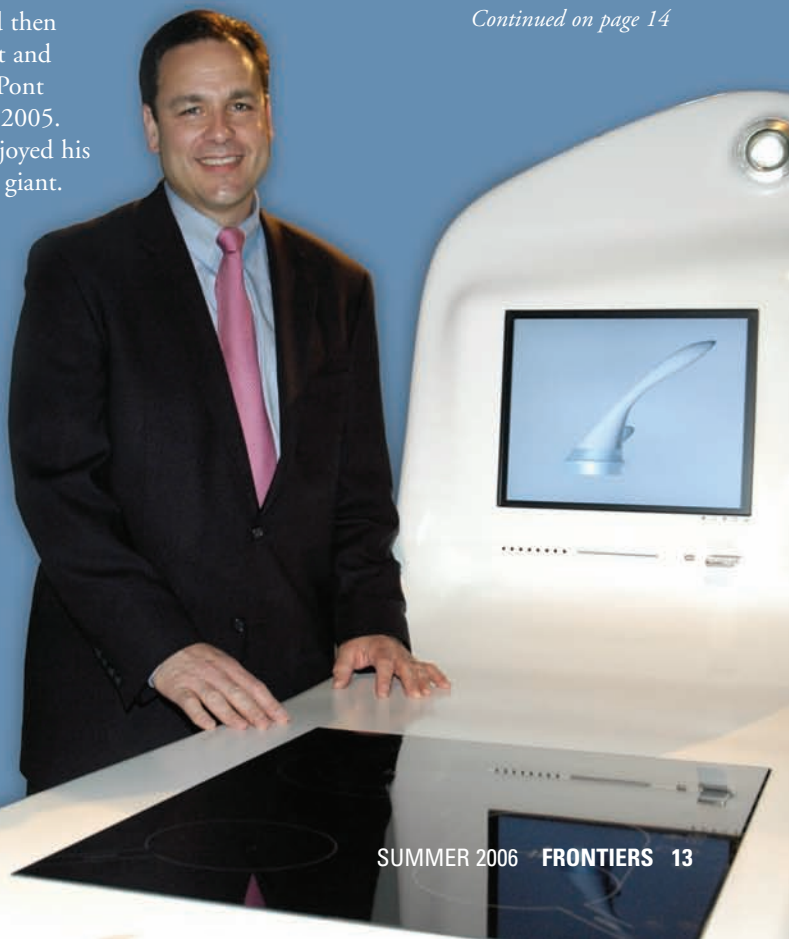
Mr. Vergnano has enjoyed his years with the chemicals giant. “DuPont is a science company. I have always had an interest in, and fascination with science, so developing solutions to our customers’ greatest issues based on science is a very exciting and energizing occupation,” he explained.

*Mark Vergnano is pictured with a ‘kitchen counter of the future’ made of DuPont Corian® and designed by the renowned architect, Zaha Hadid.*

The Safety and Protection division is home to some of the DuPont’s strongest brands, including Kevlar®, Nomex®, Tyvek®, Corian® and Zodiaq®. The division has a wide range of business applications, including cleaning and disinfecting solutions for human and animal health; personal protective equipment for both industrial protection and first responders—including police, fire personnel, EMTs, military and hazardous materials teams; building and architectural products targeting the building envelope and building interiors; life protection for civilian and military uses; industrial products, consumer safety products and safety consulting.

Though his high profile engineering career has given Mr. Vergnano a sense of fulfillment and commitment, when he entered UConn, he was enrolled as a liberal arts and sciences major. After a semester of boredom and unease about his future—and the grades to reflect these sentiments—he contemplated switching to engineering but was worried that mediocre grades would prevent the switch. “During that time I was invited to play basketball in the Field House at lunch each day with a group of guys I had recently met. One was an experienced regular with a mean hook shot. The player turned out to be G. Michael Howard, [formerly] Associate

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# UConn's Fuel Cell Center Hosts Secretary of Energy

On the morning of June 2, the Connecticut Global Fuel Cell Center (CGFCC) hosted U.S. Secretary of Energy Samuel Bodman, Under Secretary of Science Dr. Raymond Orbach, and U.S. Congressman (CT) Rob Simmons. Founded in 2001 and operated by the School of Engineering, the CGFCC is the largest university-based hub for fuel cell research, design and development in the nation. Secretary Bodman toured the center to gain an understanding of fuel cell related activities within the state and to highlight hydrogen as a fuel source for the future. The visit to UConn was arranged by former Dean of Engineering, Dr. Amir Faghri, United Technologies Endowed Chair Professor in Thermal-Fluids Engineering. Dr. Faghri welcomed Secretary Bodman and offered opening remarks at the commencement of the visit.



During his two-hour visit, Secretary Bodman—joined by Congressman Simmons and Under Secretary Orbach—toured the CGFCC, met with representatives from Connecticut's leading fuel cell companies and CGFCC personnel, and announced a new \$34.6 million federal initiative to support energy efficiency enhancements in offices and residences nationwide. The state of Connecticut is slated to receive \$514,000 under the Department of Energy initiative.

Amid tight security and the pervasive presence of Secret Service agents throughout the event, the visit was well attended by University officials, members of the media, fuel cell business leaders and faculty. Secretary Bodman and Congressman Simmons also met—and presented a Congressional Certificate of Merit—to sixth grader Kyle Hoyt of Durham, a young inventor who won honors at the 2006 Connecticut Invention Convention for his innovative design of a mini solar heater.

During an invitation-only roundtable discussion, Secretary Bodman spoke with officials from the CGFCC, CL&P, FuelCell Energy, UTC Power, Distributed Energy Systems Corp. and the Connecticut Clean Energy Fund. CGFCC Director Kenneth Reifsnider, the Pratt & Whitney Chair Professor in Design & Reliability, said Secretary Bodman was uncompromising in informing Connecticut's fuel cell companies and

*Pictured from left to right, U.S. Congressman Rob Simmons, Kyle Hoyt, and U.S. Secretary of Energy Samuel Bodman.*

researchers that he expected them to quickly refocus their efforts away from pure research and into applications. A chemical engineer by training, Secretary Bodman expressed impatience as he charged the roundtable participants to quickly transform their fuel cell know-how into practical use in consumer and industrial products. He alluded to various factors that demand more immediate action by alternative energy companies, including global warming and the continued rise in fossil fuel costs.

During his press conference remarks, Secretary Bodman expressed optimism that the nation's economy will continue to improve despite rising energy costs. He commented that the U.S. is becoming less dependent on oil and fossil fuels than it once was, but that the U.S. must find ways to develop alternative sources of energy, including fuel cells.

Dr. Faghri, Dr. Reifsnider and CGFCC Associate Director Tricia Bergman hosted the event and participated in the tour and roundtable discussion. Secretary Bodman viewed a number of fuel cell-related demonstrations and poster presentations by CGFCC faculty during his tour. He was keenly interested in understanding the core technology underlying each demonstration, and in learning the technological barriers to widespread application, according to Dr. Reifsnider. Among the demonstrations and posters presented during Secretary Bodman's visit were:

- *Hydrogen storage for PEM fuel cells*—Leon Shaw, a professor in the Chemical, Materials & Biomolecular Engineering Department

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Dean of Engineering and professor of Chemical Engineering. After hearing my desire to transfer schools, Dean Howard invited me to his office and said he would allow me to take the engineering curriculum in my second semester: if I was able to maintain a 3.5 GPA for the semester, he would admit me to the School of Engineering for my sophomore year. To this day I remain extremely grateful to Dean Howard.”

His years at UConn hold fond memories for Mr. Vergnano. Despite the University's large size, he was able to find “small pockets” that made the college

experience feel more intimate. He recalled that his graduating class in Chemical Engineering had just 40 students, and “everyone in the class knew each other very well, which provided the ability to develop great relationships and friendships.” Two fellow students in his college study group, Ray Gansley and Chris Siemer (both B.S. Chemical Engineering '80), remain his closest friends. Importantly, it was at UConn that he met his wife, Betsy, during a fortuitous football game. The couple has two teenage daughters: Elise, an economics major at Franklin and Marshall College, and Haley, a high school senior.

Mr. Vergnano was inducted into the UConn School of Engineering's Academy of Distinguished Engineers in 2005 and serves on the Board of Directors for the Delaware Council for Economic Education, a non-profit outreach group that educates K-12 students in the intricacies of business and economics. This year, Mr. and Mrs. Vergnano will be establishing the Vergnano/Reddington Family Scholarship to be awarded to an incoming Chemical Engineering student to the University.