

## Greg Alvin Howell: Aristotle and the Barbarian

Fritz Gehbauer<sup>1</sup>, Ph.D.

“Fritz, I have to tell you something ....”

... were the first words Greg spoke directly to me and they opened a five minute introduction to Lean for me during a conference in Fortaleza, Brazil. We were the international speakers.

But it was as if one of them resembled Aristotle and the other a Barbarian from one of those mountainous areas north of Macedonia. He knew little of the new philosophy. Nevertheless, Aristotle saw that the Barbarian had vast experience and had managed big projects. Therefore, he continued: “... your methods are good but not good enough.” The Barbarian had already followed Aristotle’s key note with those aspects of language communication and cooperation and collaboration that had struck him and, therefore, he listened with interest.

The result was that the Barbarian invited Aristotle to come to his country. Together they founded there a subsidiary of Aristoteles’ philosophical school. It took a while before the seed took root in that country but the way of thinking changed gradually. Meanwhile the second generation of disciples is in practical action and the school is expanding.

Aristotle could not see this success in person because he passed away. The Barbarian is mourning. But he can still hear the voice of his teacher; his words will never pass away.

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<sup>1</sup> Professor Emeritus, Karlsruhe Institute of Technology, Karlsruhe, Germany, [fritz-gehbauer@t-online.de](mailto:fritz-gehbauer@t-online.de).



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*Gregory Alvin Howell (Greg Howell) passed away peacefully on June 15, 2020 at home in Ketchum, Idaho. He was born February 3, 1943 in Springfield, Missouri to Alvin Hinshaw Howell and Joyce Howell, née Gregory. He lived in Independence, Missouri before moving to Scottsdale, Arizona when he was in high school. Greg studied construction engineering at Stanford, was a member of the ATO fraternity, and played on the university rugby team. After he graduated in 1965, Greg joined the Navy as a Lieutenant Commander in the Civil Engineering Corps and commanded Mobile Construction Battalion 11, better known as the Seabees. He served in Vietnam in Dong Ha and then led a group of 12 Navy men in a kind of Peace Corp role in northern Thailand for one year. After returning to the U.S. he served as Aide to Admiral Robert Wooding. Among his duties was recruiting on university campuses in full dress uniform amidst the rising protests against the war in Viet Nam.*

*In 1972, after leaving the Navy, Greg worked with Paolo Soleri at Arcosanti for a while, then returned to Stanford for a Master's in Construction Engineering. Two of his instructors, Henry Parker and Clark Oglesby, had just authored a book on construction productivity improvement. Their teaching inspired Greg to explore more fully how to improve construction work methods, and in 1989, Greg joined his mentors as author of Construction Productivity Improvement. After graduating in 1973, he started working at Timelapse, Inc. in Mountain View, CA. Greg eventually took over the company and hired his future wife, Dana Langhorne, as office manager.*

*In 1986, Greg moved from California to Albuquerque, where he held the position of Visiting Professor, funded by the New Mexico AGC, in the construction program at the University of New Mexico. In 1997 he left the University and moved to Ketchum, Idaho. He founded the Lean Construction Institute with Glenn Ballard to work with construction industry companies to develop and deploy Lean thinking and practice. In 2001, he founded Lean Project Consulting with Hal Macomber.*