



SCHOOL'S MAN AT THE TOP

finally lands his dream job

Last July, Dr Sam Spearing became the new deputy director of the WA School of Mines. Since then, he's moved into the acting director position. Now that's he's had a little time to settle in and find his way around his new role, it seemed like a good opportunity to learn a little more about what makes our new top man tick.

Doctor Sam Spearing spent the greater part of his career in mining as an academic-in-waiting – for a teaching role in Australia.

"On my wedding day over 32 years ago, my mother-in-law to be asked me what my ideal career would be and I replied that I hoped to some day teach at a mining university in Australia. It took me a while to get here, but I'm really enjoying my time at Curtin," Dr Spearing said.

His previous role was as an Associate Professor in the Department of Mining and Mineral Resources Engineering at Southern Illinois University Carbondale, in the United States.

Dr Spearing said he hoped his global experience would reinforce the global reputation of the school and strengthen the relationships between the Curtin WA School of Mines, the mining industry, alumni and the local community.

"As acting director, I would like to help grow research and international collaborations with the Curtin WA School of Mines while still maintaining the local history of the school," Dr Spearing said.

"This is a great school, it's got a great reputation, and I'm hoping we can take that to even greater heights," Dr Spearing says.

"(Kalgoorlie) has one of the great concentrations of mining in the world - where better to get a mining education than in a place that's surrounded by mines?"

While the international scope of modern mining is impossible to ignore, he said the unique and historic nature of the

Kalgoorlie Campus made it a special place to study, teach and research.

"This may sound a bit strange coming from a foreigner, but I do think the School of Mines needs to maintain its Australian culture," Dr Spearing said.

"It's an Australian School, we need to be proud of that and we need to build on that."

Dr Spearing has a diverse background in academia and the mining industry. With an international career spanning 40 countries, Australia is the fourth continent he has lived in.

It all began in Harare in Zimbabwe where he was born, "though in those days it was still Salisbury, Rhodesia," he said. Dr Spearing has an older sister.

He also has a very good sense of humour that began with his birth name.

"My full name is Anthony John Spencer Spearing. It was going to be Anthony Spencer Spearing (initials ASS), but my parents felt sorry for me and added the 'John'," he said.

Names played quite a role in young Sam's life and having survived accidentally being labeled an "ASS", schoolmates found a way to further test his resilience.

"When I was very young, I was named 'Tham' by my school peers. This was the name of a mentally challenged, stuttering farmyard duck in a local newspaper cartoon strip. I am ADHD and used to stutter terribly," he said.

"So that stuck at about age 6 or 7, and I only became 'Sam' when I reached high school."

It was during his younger years that he first became exposed to mining.

"My father used to work for Lonrho and the chairman, Tiny Rowland, (perhaps one of the most "colourful" business

personalities of his era), used to show me really valuable rock specimens when I was in junior school," Dr Spearing said.

With no established Mining School in Zimbabwe at the time, Sam moved to Johannesburg to study.

"I went to the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, South Africa and completed a BSc in Mining Engineering," he said.

"Anglo American Corp awarded me a four year bursary that covered it all. It was much

Dr Spearing said that it was during his graduate training program that he realised production wasn't going to be his forte.

"I fell down an ore pass due to my own stupidity and spent nine days in traction for a back injury," he said.

"I hated it; during my first two years after graduation I thought: 'what have I done?'

"But then I found something I really liked; projects and planning and things like that."

"I enjoyed rock mechanics, mine design, training and safety. I have been quite successful in designing and commercialising support related items for the mines," Dr Spearing said.

During his career, Dr Spearing has commercialised various patents and products, supported over \$1.5 million dollars of funded research since joining academia in 2007 and has been published in a variety of technical books and related publications.

"Being around students who are full of energy and ideas is really great and our WASM students are the best," he said.

And the acting director puts much of that down to the local character.

"I have always liked the Australian outlook on life, but it has cost me solidly in bets with friends as, most times, Australia beat South Africa at rugby and cricket," he said.

Sources: ABC and Curtin News.