

# Bill Chatlos, a NIRI Founder, Talks About the Early Days



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**A**s NIRI celebrates its 50th anniversary and enjoys unprecedented success in terms of influence, number of members, conference attendance, and numerous programs and activities, it’s easy to forget that the organization was not always in such a comfortable position.

William E. Chatlos, one of the founders of NIRI who served as one of its first chairs in 1973-1974, remembers the challenges of the early years. At the time he was a principal at Georgeson and ran an advisory service on shareholder relations. He also authored a monthly newsletter called *Trends in Shareholder Relations*, which was well-respected on Wall Street.

“Until 1980 we were so busy dealing with troublesome people on Wall Street that we had our hands full and were proceeding very cautiously,” he says. “The founders were not certain that NIRI was going to succeed. We simply did not have the capacity to do very many things and we did not know what our next move would be.”

At the time, many unscrupulous public relations people were wooing Wall Street media reporters with misleading information and not disclosing conflicts of interest.

“This gave Wall Street and the SEC fits,” Chatlos recalls. “One of them was a NIRI member and we tried to throw him out. Ultimately he cleaned up his act and we allowed him to remain a member.”

Chatlos also remembers the 1970s when the New York Society of Security Analysts began holding large meetings with corporate management

teams – so large that analysts were literally spilling out the doors into the street.

“I took the opposite tack,” Chatlos reports. “For my clients I selected 10-12 quality analysts who were knowledgeable in their industry and held private meetings. This was good for both companies and for analysts, who got a significant platform for the first time.”

Chatlos is pleased that NIRI and the investor relations profession has an excellent relationship with the SEC today. He notes that it was not always that way.

“In the 1970s they gave us a very short leash,” he says. “When the SEC had something to say they would contact the sponsor of a conference and demand a speaking opportunity – it wasn’t the type of relationship you have today with more active communication between the agency and the profession. Little by little we shifted the SEC each year to get them to start showing us more respect. We asked them to listen to us, and they did.”

He spoke highly of Alan Levenson, who served in the SEC Division of Corporation Finance for 14 years, rising to become director of the division. “He was a dynamic individual, a good speaker, and a good listener,” Chatlos says.

Chatlos marvels at the “brilliant” job that NIRI is doing today with its programs. “I am extremely proud of what NIRI has become,” he comments. “Never in my wildest dreams did I think we would have so much astounding success.” **IR**