Mr. Parimal Vadhar, Engineering Research Fellow at Sealed Air Corporation, Food Care Division, discusses his career path since graduating from the College and how the Department of Polymer Engineering has contributed to his success.

How has the College of Polymer Science and Polymer Engineering (CPSPE) influenced your career choice?
During my undergraduate study in Chemical Engineering at the City College of New York (CCNY), I was introduced to Polymer Science and Engineering as one of my elective courses. I really enjoyed the coursework and decided to pursue the field as a graduate student. Upon graduating from CCNY, I learned about the Akron Polymer Engineering Center (APEC) Dr. James White planned to start in the fall of 1983. It was an honor to be part of the inaugural class for the program at the University of Akron. The department was established in the Olsen Warehouse and given the remote location from the rest of campus as well as the relatively small size of the department, there were plenty of challenges along the way to establishing the new labs. With the support and guidance from Dr. White, we worked diligently to establish the program, a truly rewarding experience for all involved. Dr. White was more than a professor, he was a mentor who took a genuine interest in his students—I still think fondly of the Christmas party Dr. White hosted at his home. To show his appreciation, Dr. White surprised all the students who supported him to set up the labs, as well as those who provided administrative support to run the department smoothly.

How has CPSPE prepared you for your career?
After completing the graduate program in 1985, I joined Signode in Glenview, IL, which eventually became a division of Illinois Tool Works (ITW). Signode was expanding their research and development capabilities to develop new markets for their core business in PP and PET sheet extrusion and orientation. I was put in the charge of setting up a new analytical lab and understanding crystallization kinetics and processing of CPET. I got an opportunity to work with Prof. James Throne, who was hired as a technical consultant for the CPET tray manufacturing process. My graduate research in polyolefin blends with Dr. Thein Kyu provided a solid foundation and I was able to contribute immediately to my first assignment. There were also several Polymer Engineering courses that have helped to shape my professional career. I enjoyed the rheology course taught by Dr. James White. He made the course very interesting as he shared historical aspects of processing a variety of polymers. The rheology course provided the fundamentals of polymer processing regardless of which segment of the plastic industry you work in. Engineering Properties of Solid Polymers taught by Prof. Avaram Isayev really helped in my career with development and design of new packaging products. Compared to other disciplines of engineering, I find working with polymers involves both science and art. This is mainly due to how the polymer structure is developed in a given process and its impact on the final properties. My journey to date working in R&D has exposed me to a variety of materials, processing, and application. There has not been a dull moment.

What has your journey been like since graduating from CPSPE?
My professional journey began at Signode/ITW where I developed products for consumer and industrial packaging. The company was venturing into the refrigerated and frozen meal markets. This gave me an opportunity to develop crystallized PET-based trays. There was a major concern with packaging products ending up in beaches and marine environment even in the 1980s. This gave me great exposure to the recycling of plastics and manufacturing products from degradable plastics. I joined the Cryovac Division of W.R. Grace in 1995 to develop multilayer films for food and (continued on next page)
protective packaging. The new job allowed me to work with a variety of polymers and processes. The fundamentals of polymer rheology became very helpful in multilayer film extrusion. There are always challenges with every new project but there is a freedom to try out new ideas. You continue to learn about new materials, new processes, and test methods. You embrace the challenge and also learn from your failures, but you have to keep trying and coming up with new innovative products. This is what I like and enjoy working in R&D.

What is your career path now?
When you work for a large corporation, you have an option to choose a technical or managerial path. I chose the technical path, which allows me to work on new R&D projects that include product and process development. Some projects start from a conceptual stage, so I get an opportunity to take it from a pilot scale all the way to manufacturing. Each project team consists of marketing, development engineer and application person. My most recent experience has been supporting development projects in Asia. It has given me an opportunity to work on new applications for the region and collaborating with colleagues in Asia. There are some challenges working on projects outside North America; however, with new challenges bring new opportunities. There is a lot of growth potential in the region and I plan to continue to serve in this role for the next several years.

Is there anything else you would like to share about yourself or your family?
I have been an active board member of SPE Thermoplastic Materials and Foams Division (TPM&F) since 1998, serving in various board positions including Best Paper Chair, Education Chair, and Division Chair. In last 5 years serving as a Councillor for the TPM&F Division has provided a great opportunity to work with SPE Executive Board and other Councilors. Attending ANTEC each year allows me to network with other professionals in the plastics industry and academia. I look forward to meeting with Prof. Isayev and former students at ANTEC. SPE provides great network opportunity and would recommend everyone to join, and if possible take an active role. The Society needs our support and stays relevant. My current employer, Sealed Air Corp, has moved its headquarters and R&D Center to Charlotte, NC. Hence, I have moved to Charlotte early this year and slowly settling down in this new location. I have one son and one daughter. Both have completed their undergraduate study in a healthcare field. During my spare time, we prefer to travel within the USA or overseas. My wife and I also volunteer at local organizations and at our temple.