

Precast concrete promotion

William Atkinson



Monica Schultes, who recently started her own consulting firm, MM Schultes Consulting LLC, is also the past executive director of the Pennsylvania Precast Association and former executive director of what is now the PCI Mid-Atlantic Region. As one of seven children,

she played several sports and loved to read. She says her father was an “engineer’s engineer,” who ran the production side of the family’s water well drilling business and instilled in his children the importance of being lifetime learners.

To keep his children active, he built a court for tennis and basketball in their backyard, leading Schultes to become passionate about tennis, playing in high school and as a walk-on in college. In addition, at some PCI conventions she had the opportunity to play tennis with colleagues in between meetings. “I still play in USTA leagues today,” she says.

Schultes attended Villanova University in Villanova, Pa., and earned a BS in civil engineering. Several years later, she returned to Villanova part time and eventually received an MBA with an emphasis in marketing. “Attending Dale Carnegie professional speaking courses also helped me build confidence and competence in my public communication skills,” she says.

“I had always been interested in the concrete industry, but not as familiar with precast,” she says. “Our civil engineering program only touched on it briefly in the curriculum.” Schultes was involved in the construction of a bridge with precast concrete girders during her time as an engineer-in-training, but the position of executive director of the Mid-Atlantic Precast Association (MAPA), now the PCI Mid-Atlantic Chapter, is what really piqued her interest.

Before interviewing for the MAPA position, Schultes had little experience in the precast concrete industry. “I am grateful that the Executive Committee saw some potential and gave me the opportunity to learn and grow in that role,” she says.

Schultes says that since becoming involved in the precast concrete industry in the 1990s, she has “orbited around the PCI world” in various positions. After more than a decade as the executive director of MAPA, she joined a large precast concrete manufacturer in sales and marketing. She then started a consulting firm. “It would have floundered had it not been for

all the many friends and acquaintances I made during my years attending PCI Committee Days and conventions,” she says.

Schultes then managed a National Precast Concrete Association affiliate group for many years and even assisted in finding a replacement for the MAPA executive director.

She also started to write case studies for PCI’s *Ascent* magazine. “I still find it fascinating interviewing architects about their precast projects,” she says. “They show such pride in their work and continue to push the envelope with new applications.” Schultes then began to contribute to PCI’s bridge magazine, *Aspire*, as both an author and more recently as technical editor.

“It sounds cliché, but the people that make up the [precast concrete] industry are second to none,” she says. “I have never met such dedicated, selfless professionals who are passionate about sharing their knowledge and spreading the word about precast, prestressed concrete. It is easy when you have a great product that is technically sound and provides opportunities for continued development and expansion like the introduction of UHPC.”

Currently, Schultes is enjoying helping precast concrete professionals. “It is an honor and privilege to help the many companies behind the scenes tell their stories,” she says. “Many engineers are humble and don’t take the time to promote their companies, products, projects, and especially themselves. Each of the publications I am involved with carves out pages dedicated to professionals and offers insights into how their companies have flourished and the amazing bridges and buildings they have designed and built.”

Schultes says that the gift of lifetime learning is a two-way street. “For every fascinating job you read about in the *PCI Journal* or *Aspire* or *Ascent*, there are projects that you can share with colleagues,” she says. “Take advantage of all the precasters and suppliers who are eager to grow the industry, but also find a way to give back in some way. Acknowledge the universal truth that 20% of the volunteers shoulder most of the work. Be an active participant in that 80/20 rule, and do more than your share. Remember that rather than competing against each other, all that collective energy of the industry should be focused on increasing the market share and awareness of precast concrete and competing against other materials.”