An early commitment to precast concrete

William Atkinson

After an early life of moving from one place to another as a result of his father being in the Air Force, Steve Brock settled in Mississippi. He always excelled in math and thought he wanted to go into architecture until he learned that it was more about art than math. He decided that engineering would probably be a better career and earned a bachelor's degree in civil engineering from Mississippi State University.

After graduating, in 1982, Brock took a job with the state highway department. The work was less than challenging, so he began to look around and found an interesting opportunity with Jackson Stone Co., a cast stone and architectural precast concrete manufacturer in Jackson, Miss.

"I had no idea what precast concrete was, but by chance it was the right fit for my interests and gifts," he says. "At Jackson Stone, an engineer was the sole customer contact for a project. I was the drafter, project manager, purchaser, delivery coordinator, and engineer. That variety of tasks served me well later in my career."

After working at Jackson Stone for eight years, Brock took a job as engineering manager for Bluegrass Art Cast in Winchester, Ky., after which he was promoted to plant manager and then general manager of the company's Tennessee plant. Bluegrass Art Cast was acquired by Gate Petroleum Co. in 1996 and the company became Gate Bluegrass Precast. "I was made a vice president a few years later, and July 1, 2001, I became president, which didn't last long, as 73 days later was September 11," he says. "The economy crashed, and precast projects were few and far between." Gate ended up merging precast concrete operations a couple of years later under the name Gate Precast Co., where Brock held the positions of senior vice president of Midwest operations.

In terms of involvement with PCI, Brock helped Bluegrass Art Cast become PCI certified in 1992 and started attending conventions shortly after that. He later became senior vice president of engineering at Gate, a job that required coordination of all of Gate's plants' engineering operations.

"By being responsible for the design of multiple product lines in different areas of the country for a rather large precaster, it seemed like a win-win for the precast industry--and for Gate--for me to be active in PCI committees," he says. Since that time, Brock has served as a member of the Research & Development and Technical Activities Councils, as well as on the Innovation, Precast Insulated Wall Panels, BIM, and Business Performance Committees. Also a past chair of the Innovation Committee, he has been on multiple advisory groups and served as chair for multiple research projects, including several at Oak Ridge National Laboratory in Oak Ridge, Tenn.

What Brock enjoys most about the precast concrete industry is that it continues to evolve. "Designers, property owners, and society continue to press for something bigger, better, and different," he says. "Getting involved with PCI research is much more comprehensive and effective than any one company could possibly do on their own. Members of the industry continue to compete against each other day in and day out. However, I've found that they are willing to share their knowledge, experience, and lessons learned without hesitation, leading to continuous improvement in the industry and a rare camaraderie across companies."

Brock says he is especially proud of his recent work in spearheading and partnering with Oak Ridge National Laboratory, Additive Engineering Solutions, and PCI's Research & Development Council on the use of three-dimensional printed forms on One South First Tower, a 42-story building for the Domino Park redevelopment project in Brooklyn, N.Y.

But as a favorite, Brock recalls with fondness one of his first precast concrete projects. "Whenever I watch a Mississippi State University football game on TV, I see panels that I designed 40 years ago," he says. "They are a small portion of the overall facility, but still, that was a long time ago and they still look great."