



# Heart of the industry

Sarah Fister Gale



When Thomas D'Arcy was 18 years old, his father drove him to the University of Illinois, sent him into the university administrator's office, and told him he had 30 minutes to decide what he wanted to be. "I was good at math, so I picked civil engineering," D'Arcy says.

That single decision led D'Arcy down a career path that helped raise the bar for excellence in the precast concrete industry. Over the course of his career, D'Arcy has held many roles within PCI, chairing at least eight technical committees. He has also worked in the private sector with several past PCI presidents to build some of the most respected precast concrete structures in the United States. He is also one of only 18 precast concrete professionals to receive PCI's highest award, the Medal of Honor, for his many years of service to the industry, and the only Professional Member elected to PCI chairman.

D'Arcy's career as a precast concrete professional began in 1955. After receiving his civil engineering degree and serving briefly during the Korean War via his Reserve Officer Training Corps commission, he took a job at Hazelet and Erdal in Chicago, Ill., where he helped design precast, prestressed concrete bridges. D'Arcy had a decided advantage in the field, having studied precast concrete at the University of Illinois.

"A lot of people were excited about prestressed, precast concrete in the '50s, but I was the only one in the firm with any experience," he says.

Five years later, at the urging of Norm Scott, former PCI executive director, he was hired as the first full-time employee of PCI in Chicago.

"Back then there were only two of us in the office, and we did everything," D'Arcy says.

Over the next four years D'Arcy served as technical director and editor of the *PCI Journal*, wrote the newsletter, and directed industry research.

In 1965, D'Arcy left PCI for a job with Concrete Materials in North Carolina, where he worked closely with company owner Peter Verna to design Riverplace Tower, the famous precast, segmental prestressed concrete 32-story Gulf Life office building in Jacksonville, Fla.

"Pete was one of the most creative engineers in the industry," D'Arcy says of his first mentor. "I learned the business from him."

He later took a job with San-Vel Corp. in Littleton, Mass., where company president Al Roy taught him the importance of quality.

"Al was adamant about quality and about meeting clients' expectations," he says.

That commitment to excellence helped the company achieve a national reputation and set high standards among competitors, D'Arcy says. "Whatever project we bid, if we were in the ballpark we were chosen because they knew we would do a great job."

Later, D'Arcy worked under Hayes Swayze at Rocky Mountain Prestress in Colorado, where he learned more about the business side of the industry. "The most important lessons I learned at that job were that business is only fun when you are making a profit, and you have to know your costs to control your expenses."

In 1982, D'Arcy reunited with Norm Scott to form the Consulting Engineers Group (CEG) of Texas. Using the lessons he had learned from his mentors, D'Arcy worked with Scott and the staff to design more than 300 parking structures, 70 major stadiums, and 200 precast concrete prisons over 25 years.

When the now semiretired D'Arcy is not spending time with his wife, four children, and seven grandchildren, he still attends PCI meetings and is renowned for his precast concrete-themed poetry and his culinary prowess as one of the Concrete Chefs who cook for PCI members during Committee Days. He also serves as chairman of the PCI Foundation.

Looking back on his career, D'Arcy credits PCI with educating builders and architects about the many quality and cost benefits that precast concrete brings to a project. "We helped people see that precast concrete is the best construction material made by man."

He urges the next generation of precast concrete professionals to take advantage of all that PCI has to offer.

"PCI is the heart of the industry," he says. "If you are not involved, you are missing out on a lifetime of experiences and wonderful friendships." ■