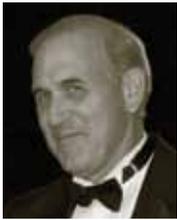


A family business

Rory Cleveland



“Building and flying airplanes has helped me understand the importance of measurement in improving, understanding, and controlling processes in a manufacturing business,” Robert Finfrock says.

The business in question is Finfrock Design-Manufacture-Construct in Apopka, Fla., which his father founded in 1945 as Finfrock Industries Inc. Now president and chief executive officer, Finfrock got involved

with the company early on.

“I received my first paycheck in 1957 at age 14 and never considered anything else,” he says.

Earning a bachelor of engineering from Vanderbilt University in 1965 and a master of commercial science from Rollins College’s Crummer Graduate School of Business in 1971, he reinvested the knowledge he gained in the family business.

During more than 50 years in the precast concrete industry, Finfrock has tallied numerous accomplishments. However, he might never have achieved so much if not for a particularly challenging project early in his career.

“My father’s development of the prestressed concrete pole, and particularly a project in 1960 that I participated in, advanced the structural engineering knowledge of our industry,” he says. “The structural analysis was performed on a Portland Cement Association computer, which was rare for our industry at that time. This project certainly sparked my interest in engineering and in our industry.”

After that pivotal project, he earned credentials as a professional engineer and certified general contractor in the state of Florida.

Finfrock recognizes that the precast concrete industry has advanced greatly during his career.

“The title of a 1957 PCI publication, *Tentative Recommendations for the Design of Prestressed Concrete*, illustrates, by use of the word ‘tentative,’ the progress we have made since then in the design of our products,” he says. “This publication dealt largely with the flexural design of prestressed concrete members but did not address connections between members. This reflected the use of precast/prestressed concrete products at that time as secondary members, not as complete structural systems.”

Finfrock also says that “improvement in the infrastructure of our country along with improvements and the increased capacity of handling and transportation equipment has permitted our products to increase in size. This has resulted in productivity improvement that has allowed our products to remain competitive in the marketplace.”

Eventually, Finfrock’s career focus shifted from engineering to business-model innovation.

“I was dissatisfied with the commodity nature of the precast/prestressed concrete industry and changed our market delivery system by incorporating a design/build approach,” he says.

His experience in this field led to the publication of the book *Beyond Price: Differentiate Your Company in Ways that Really Matter*, which he coauthored with industry consultant Kay Plantes.

“It grew out of Kay’s involvement with our industry while I was the Management Activities Council chair [at PCI] from 1993 to 1995,” Finfrock says.

A PCI Titan, Finfrock has also been a member of the Industry Handbook and Technical Activities committees and he served on the Board of Directors from 1988 through 1997 and as chairman in 1992.

He says, “My current involvement is more as a Supplier Associate Member than a Producer Member due to our ownership position in our software company, StructureWorks LLC,” which develops three-dimensional modeling software for producing drawings for precast concrete structures.

Today all three of his sons hold vice-president positions with Finfrock Design-Manufacture-Construct: Allen in Design, Bill in Sales, and Dan in Manufacturing.

While Finfrock could no doubt go on at length about the lessons he has earned during his long, illustrious career, his advice for future industry leaders and experts is short and to the point: “Differentiate your company and deliver value to your customers.” ■