

Bringing PCI to market

Rory Cleveland



People might be surprised to learn that alongside travel, exercise, and jazz, PCI's first president emeritus, Tom Battles, sang lead in a barbershop quartet during high school and college. The pastime set the pattern for his 47-year career coordinating and harmonizing with those around him.

Battles served as executive director of the Chicago, Ill., Chapter & Illinois Council of the American Institute of Architects (AIA). He was PCI president from 1987 to 2003, and was active in the American Institute of Architects, the Construction Specifications Institute, the American Society of Association Executives, and the American Concrete Institute.

After graduating with honors from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign with a bachelor's degree in architectural engineering, Battles began on the career path that led to his PCI post. "Eventually I felt the desire to become more involved in marketing and people contact than architecture could provide," Battles says.

That desire drew him to the concrete industry, where he began developing his specialty of marketing and strategic planning as an architectural marketing consultant at the Portland Cement Association (PCA).

Before joining PCA, Battles worked at Skidmore, Owings & Merrill and Holabird & Root in Chicago. He later served as a principal of Anderson & Battles Architects, an award-winning Chicago firm. Battles returned to the concrete industry in 1971 as PCI's first director of the architectural precast concrete division.

Battles started PCI's first *Architectural Precast Concrete Design Manual* on its way to publication before becoming vice president of marketing at Martin Concrete Engineering Co. in Neponset, Ill. After two years, he moved to Martin's new operation in Texas. When Martin sold its Texas operation in 1978, Battles became president of Fiber-Seal International Inc., based in Dallas, Tex.

After taking the helm as PCI president in fall 1987, Battles overcame "stiff resistance from some of our members" to take on one of PCI's most challenging projects: our first comprehensive marketing plan, which included the founding of *Ascent* magazine and required a pledge of support from PCI and its members of more than \$1 million per year for five years.

Since then, Battles says, "there have been significant improvements in the exposure of engineering and architecture students to our industry's products, thanks to the efforts of PCI's Education Committee, the PCI Foundation, and the PCI staff. "However, we still have an enor-

mous task to gain parity with steel and cast-in-place concrete in architecture and engineering curricula."

Battles has contributed to precast concrete's progress toward market parity by working to approve mandatory certification for PCI member plants, which he places "probably at the top of the list" of the most challenging obstacles he faced during his tenure at PCI.

In "A Tribute to Thomas B. Battles," in the May-June 2003 issue of the *PCI Journal*, he said, "PCI has transformed itself from being only product- and technically driven to being aggressively marketing driven. The technical and marketing components are now working in concert."

"For the most part, our producers are also working collaboratively, rather than as competitors. Further, we have benefitted dramatically from the support and expansion of our PCI regional marketing organizations."

Aside from the precast concrete industry's increased marketing effort, "significant improvements" have been made in the area of quality control, Battles says.

As for the industry's future, Battles says, "The biggest challenges are the need for increased emphasis on even more professional marketing, larger investment in automated production, creating new and more exciting products, and moving from a low-bid mentality to one of added value." He suggests that future industry leaders and experts focus on those areas. ▮