

MEET MATT COOPER

Giving back, building forward

Mason Nichols



From an early age, Matt Cooper knew he wanted to build things.

As a student, his interest quickly turned practical. In high school, Cooper took every technical drawing class available and worked part-time creating CAD details for a local engineering firm. He continued that work

through college, strengthening his connection to design and construction. After graduation, Cooper initially followed many of his peers into general contracting. One of his first jobs out of college was at Turner Construction, but it didn't take long for him to realize something was missing.

"I didn't just want to build what other engineers told me to build," Cooper says. "I also didn't want to sit in an office and crunch numbers all day."

Cooper's search for balance led to precast concrete. While reviewing submittals from Shockey Precast (now Metromont) in Virginia, he discovered a company where engineering, manufacturing, and construction were fully connected. In 2004, he joined the organization as a structural engineer. More than two decades later, he now serves as Metromont's director of engineering and drafting.

"This work gives me a great sense of accomplishment," he says. "You can drive or walk by buildings you helped design and build and know you had a hand in bringing them to life."

Cooper's connection to precast concrete is fueled by the nature of the material itself. He values the creative flexibility that precast concrete provides, noting that no two projects are ever the same. Clients continually seek distinct architectural expressions, unique functionality, and innovative solutions, all challenges that keep him engaged.

One notable project for Cooper is the Pavilion Parking Deck (PennFIRST) in Philadelphia, Pa., a five-level underground total-precast concrete structure supporting a 17-story hospital above. The project, which earned an honorable mention in the 2021 PCI Design Awards, involved unconventional approaches, including precast concrete exterior walls retaining significant earth pressures well below grade.

"It pushed the boundaries of what we typically do in precast," Cooper says. "The collaboration and complexity made it especially engaging."

Cooper also pointed to a Cornell University student housing development in Ithaca, N.Y., where Metromont delivered roughly 240,000 ft² (22,300 m²) of insulated precast concrete panels with 70,000 cast-in terra-cotta tiles. The project transformed what would have been a traditional rainscreen facade into an integrated precast concrete solution, blending performance with architectural detail.

Although these projects and others have shaped Cooper's career, he says he believes his most lasting impact has come through helping people grow.

Mentorship has long been central to Cooper's approach. Over the years, he has hired and mentored engineers who have gone on to leadership roles at Metromont and across the precast concrete industry. Watching those individuals build confidence, capability, and responsibility has been one of the most fulfilling parts of his career.

That commitment extends into his work with PCI. Cooper's PCI involvement includes contributing to the *PCI Design Handbook: Precast and Prestressed Concrete*, most notably serving as chapter chair for the ninth edition's new chapter on extreme events, as well as participating as a member on the Architectural Precast Concrete Committee, Blast Resistance and Structural Integrity Committee, and Leadership PCI Committee and as a consulting member of the BIM Committee.

He says PCI has helped him grow both technically and professionally.

"PCI talks a lot about its body of knowledge," Cooper says. "That knowledge comes from volunteers. You can really get a lot out of PCI if you're willing to put a lot into it."

Cooper says he is also energized by industry innovation, particularly the evolution of building information modeling (BIM), which continues to be a powerful tool for extracting data, improving efficiency, and enhancing safety. Alongside BIM, Cooper says advances in prefabrication, automation, and manufacturing efficiency continue to shape the industry's future.

As he looks ahead, Cooper's philosophy remains people centered and grounded in the power humans bring to precast concrete.

"If people want a better industry, they can be a part in building it," he says. 