



MEET JOSEPH WARNES

Adventures in concrete

K. Michelle Burgess



Both within and outside of his career, forward thinker Joseph Warnes is an adventurer, climbing mountains and working on massive international construction projects.

Following service as a U.S. Naval Aviator in the Pacific theater in World War II, Warnes went to school on the G.I. Bill. At the College of Wooster in Ohio, he was taking pre-med classes with the goal of

becoming a psychiatrist.

“After a couple of years,” Warnes says, “it became evident that I was a person who wanted to be where big things were happening in the outdoor world and not be closed up in an office.”

He switched majors and schools and graduated in 1951 with a combined bachelor’s and master’s degree in civil and structural engineering from Ohio State University in Columbus.

Warnes began his concrete career in 1952 with the Portland Cement Association (PCA), where he stayed for 17 years.

In the 1960s, he discovered a novel site precast concrete apartment construction project under way south of San Francisco, Calif. “It was a systems project, one of my strong interests, and was very successful,” Warnes says. “Thus began my lifelong addiction to precast concrete.”

His experiences at PCA with innovative precast concrete manufacturing companies Rocky Mountain Prestress and Colorado Prestress, while living in Denver, Colo., reinforced his conviction that precast concrete was the wave of the future.

After Warnes worked for Morrison-Knudsen building food-processing plants in Turkey and Iran, a consortium headed by HOK of St. Louis, Mo., hired him to work on what was the largest precast concrete project in the world at the time, the University of Riyadh in Saudi Arabia, from 1979 to 1981. Projected to cost \$4.1 billion and to take eight years to build, every structure in the complex was to be fabricated with precast concrete.

“The adventures I experienced there would fill a book by itself,” Warnes says. “Almost every morning for the entire time I was with the project, I would drive to work and ask myself in amazement as I entered the site if such a huge project could be real.”

Following that tour, Warnes was retained by an Arab engineering and management consulting firm and over a period of more than 10 years was assigned to various projects as a project and construction manager with collateral responsibility for teaching seminars in precast concrete and project management to local engineers throughout the Middle East and North Africa.

When he wasn’t working on complex international projects, Warnes tended to undertake daring hobbies. While his children were young, he was active in the volunteer ski patrol in California and Colorado, eventually becoming patrol leader for two different patrols. After formal mountaineering training in the Grand Tetons in Wyoming, he became the mountaineering instructor for the patrol and led a number of expeditions up the Cascades’ second highest peak, the more than 14,000 ft (4300 m) Mount Shasta, where he taught glacier rescue techniques.

“My dream was to climb the Matterhorn in Switzerland,” Warnes says, “and after several tries I finally accomplished it at the age of 55.”

After a fall on the east face of Mount Whitney in California later that year, Warnes hung up his climbing rope and turned to wilderness exploring in various mountain ranges. He also bicycles, deep-sea fishes, and scuba dives.

In addition to getting plenty of vitamins and minerals, moderate exercise, and minimal alcohol, Warnes says, “My philosophy is, never retire until you are ready to pass through the pearly gates to the next world. Life is always promising new adventures.”

He now specializes in consulting on design and construction of disaster-proof concrete homes. ■