

MEET DONNA REUTER

From bookkeeper to chairman

Sarah Fister Gale



Donna Reuter was the first female chairman of PCI—not to mention one of the first women to hold a general manager position in the entire precast concrete industry—but that isn't what she wants people to remember. "I didn't

want to be recognized for achieving those things because I am a woman; I wanted to be recognized for being good enough to get those jobs," she says. And indeed she was.

Reuter grew up in Long Island, N.Y., and landed her first job in the precast concrete industry as a bookkeeper for Spancrete Northeast (which became part of Oldcastle Precast) while pursuing a bachelor's degree at Siena College near Albany, N.Y. She didn't finish that degree, but she stayed on at Spancrete and worked her way up in the company. After a few years on the job, at the urging of the company president, she returned to school to take a management development program at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. "He felt I had potential and wanted me to get an education so I could be considered for management positions within Oldcastle," she says.

After completing the yearlong course, she was promoted to controller, taking financial responsibility for four divisions of the company. Then, in the early 1990s, when Oldcastle was on the verge of reorganization, the group president asked her what she wanted to do next. "He offered me a role as VP of administration, but I was ready for something new," she says. So instead she took a role in operations at a plant outside of Albany.

In that role, she was mentored by the general manager of the plant and slowly moved up the ranks, becoming vice president of general management and eventually president and regional chief operating officer of Oldcastle Precast Building Systems. "There were no glass ceilings at Oldcastle," she says.

While she moved into higher levels of leadership at Oldcastle, Reuter became a frequent participant in the PCI community. She first got involved with PCI Northeast when she moved into operations and eventu-

ally started attending national PCI meetings and conferences. "At the time, there were few women in the industry," she says, "but I found PCI to be a very welcoming environment."

In the early years, she joined several committees. Then, in 2004, she was elected to a two-year term on the PCI Board of Directors. Following that position, she took a couple of years to focus on her career but returned to PCI leadership in 2009 when she became the secretary. Then in 2010, she became vice chair, and finally in 2011, she was the chairman.

She isn't certain why she was tapped for the role. Perhaps it was her finance background or the fact that Oldcastle was a prominent company in the industry, she says. Regardless, she was excited to take the position and to become a voice in the precast concrete community. "My platform was, if you don't like something, get involved and change it," she says.

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She spent much of her time as chairman talking to industry professionals about the value of the PCI community, how easy it is to get involved with committees and working groups, and how important that participation is to the future of the industry. "It's not enough to just go to the conferences," she says. "We need more people to get involved with what's happening in the industry."

Reuter retired in 2013, but she hopes her message to get involved spurs action in the next generation of precast concrete professionals. "The precast/prestressed industry is fortunate to have so many talented folks willing to share information and help out when it's needed," she says. "It would be foolish not to utilize such a valuable resource." ■