Reaching out to the industry

Sarah Fister Gale

When Pat Hynes decided to attend college at the University of Idaho in Moscow, Idaho, he wanted to follow in his father's footsteps. His dad was just three classes shy of a civil engineering degree when he left school, and he encouraged his son to finish what he had started.

"It sounded like a good profession, and I never looked back," he says.

Hynes received his civil engineering degree in 1972 and took a job at RTP Concrete in Eagle, Idaho, the following spring. He spent 13 years at the company, first as a drafting technician, then a quality control manager, and eventually an engineering manager.

When he wasn't designing bridges and other projects for RTP, he coached little league football, operated a small farm, raced thoroughbred horses, and skied competitively.

"When I retire, I'm going to become a ski bum," he says, laughing.

Those were busy years for Hynes, but eventually an opportunity arose that caused him to leave it all behind. In 1985, the owners of Morse Brothers in Eugene, Ore., (now part of Knife River Prestress) approached him about a job.

"I wasn't looking for something new, but they courted me," he says.

He took the job and has been at Morse Bros./Knife River ever since. Today Hynes is director of engineering and sales, where he works on "everything but bridges." And although he worked on many great projects over the years, the one he remembers most is the Autzen Stadium, home of the Oregon Ducks, in Eugene, Ore.

"It stands out because it is the biggest project I have ever worked on," he says. "It is one of my favorites."

Although Hynes's career is about a lot more than just building great structures, he has also dedicated himself to educating the next generation of precast concrete professionals about how the material works and how it can be applied to solve real-world construction challenges in innovative ways. Hynes regularly lectures at Oregon State University, University of Portland, Portland State University, and Oregon Institute of Technology. He also participates in scholarship programs and works with young students to show them how rocks are mined and what they are used for.

"The earlier you start with them, the better educated they become," he says.

He has also taken a leadership role in the education efforts at PCI. Although he has served on many committees since joining the organization in 1988, Hynes is best known for his work as zone director and student education chair for six years and his current position as the ad hoc Educational Activities Council chair.

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He views his lectures and his work with the education groups as a way to "prime the pump" for the next generation. "Young people today don't know what precast is," he says, "so we've got to stay in front of it by educating them."

In his lectures, he focuses on the technical aspect of precast concrete a lot, but he also talks to his students about the softer side of the industry. He reminds them to talk to the tradespeople on the jobsite and to make friends with the client's staff. "These are the people who know how things work, and they have valuable knowledge to offer," he says.

He also encourages young professionals to keep studying after they graduate and to take advantage of the great educational and networking opportunities that PCI has to offer. Hynes remembers how impressed he was the first time he saw industry leaders like Bob Mast and Tom D'Arcy hanging out with everyone else. "These were the bigwigs. I knew them from reading about their work," he says, "but they were very down to earth."

Hynes says he hopes that the next generation will get as much benefit from PCI as he has over the years. "It's not all technical committees and handbooks. It's also a place to make great friends," he says. "Some of the best people I know are part of PCI. For me, that's been the most important part."