

## MEET MIKE LANIER

# Concrete thinking

Sarah Fister Gale



Mike LaNier may have grown up in the midwestern state of Ohio, but at 18 he headed west thanks to a Centennial Scholars Program scholarship to the University of Denver in Colorado.

Not realizing that the Centennial Scholars Program required him to join a cohort of his peers in attending classes on history, philosophy, and the origins of religion, LaNier randomly chose to pursue a degree in civil engineering because he “had to pick something.”

He wasn’t terribly interested in the required Centennial Scholars Program courses at the time, though in hindsight they affected the way he approached his life and career.

“I left school realizing I didn’t know how to think,” he says. “I spent a lot of time thinking about that.”

LaNier went on to pursue a long and successful career in civil engineering, and he often found himself on projects asking, “what’s missing?” and “how can we do this better?” “It was a useful way to think differently about how we do things,” he says.

When LaNier graduated from the University of Denver in 1965, he got a job as a junior engineer with Boeing’s airplane structure test group in Seattle, Wash., where he tested airframes and operating systems in a lab environment. But soon after, the aerospace industry took a downturn, and like many of his peers he transitioned to the construction industry. In the early 1970s, he secured a position at ABAM (now BergerABAM), a civil engineering consulting firm in Federal Way, Wash., founded by Tom and Art Anderson, who also owned Concrete Technology Corp. (CTC), the nation’s first precast concrete plant.

LaNier had little experience with precast concrete at the time, short of spending his lunch hours walking around the CTC plant to see what they were working on. But six months into his new job, Art Anderson called him into his office, handed him a stack of reports on precast concrete construction tolerances, and told him to join PCI’s Tolerances Committee.

“He said, ‘They need someone like you on the committee,’ and that really stuck with me,” LaNier says. The words of encouragement emboldened him to immediately join PCI and get a seat on the committee. He was soon immersed in help-

ing to produce PCI’s first *Tolerance Manual for Precast and Prestressed Concrete Construction*. That experience had a huge impact on LaNier’s career. “It was the first of many experiences I had at PCI working with motivated, talented people who were willing to volunteer their time to improve their industry,” he says.

It also taught him the value of pushing younger engineers to get involved. “A little encouragement goes a long way,” he says.

LaNier stayed with BergerABAM for the rest of his career, moving up the ranks from junior engineer and project manager to department manager, executive vice president, and eventually chairman of the board. Throughout it all, he played an active role in PCI, serving as chairman and member on the Tolerances Committee and the Technical Activities Committee (TAC), governing on the original board of the PCI Foundation, and participating on the Plant Certification Committee, which brought quality and standardization to plants across the industry. In 2014, he was named a PCI Titan, an honor dedicated to individuals who have had a profound effect on the precast/prestressed concrete industry.

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When asked what advice he would offer the next generation of PCI members, he turned his attention to their bosses. “Senior management needs to understand that they will get value from sending their young people to PCI,” he says. BergerABAM has always encouraged its young engineers to join the association because they see the importance of developing professionalism in young people and helping them build a strong network with their industry peers. “We are contributing to the greater good of the industry and its members.”

He says he also believes that the precast concrete industry is uniquely positioned to help the broader U.S. construction industry improve productivity on projects and jobsites. “If we continue to focus on plant production and communicating the value proposition of precast concrete, precasters have a bright future.” 