



MEET Alvin Ericson

Precast concrete convert

Sarah Fister Gale



Alvin Ericson's father was a structural engineer, so when he entered the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in Cambridge in the mid-1970s, he was expected to follow in his father's footsteps, but Ericson had other plans. "I didn't see myself as an engineer," he says. Instead,

he pursued a degree in architecture and imagined he would spend his career designing buildings.

Then he took a class that put him on the path to a career in precast concrete.

The class was a study of building materials that focused on steel, wood, and concrete. As part of the curriculum, his professor took the students on plant tours in each discipline. One of the tours was of San-Vel Concrete Corp., which at the time was one of the largest precast concrete producers in the world.

Ericson remembers being in awe of the massive plant, which had 10 acres under cover and an overhead monorail that ferried concrete pieces across the plant for placement. "It was very impressive," he says. "Little did I know I'd end up working in that plant a few years later."

When Ericson graduated, the economy was in a downturn and there were no architecture jobs, but he landed a role in the drafting department at Unistress, a precast concrete company in his hometown of Pittsfield, Mass. Ericson liked the job, but he wanted to get back to Boston, Mass. He interviewed for a position in the engineering department at San-Vel—the plant he first visited in college—but was ultimately hired onto the sales department.

"That was another turning point for my career," he says. "It taught me how important it is to pay attention to the people you meet because you never know what impact they will have later on."

In his first few months at San-Vel, Ericson recalls a PCI representative stopping by for a meeting. During the meeting, the PCI employee asked everyone in the room what PCI did for them. Ericson's response was blunt. "I didn't see what the organization did for me," Ericson says he told the rep.

He said that his colleagues were shocked, but at the time, the association was more focused on midcareer experts than on students and young professionals. "That's why I like the new direction PCI is taking," he says. "They are paying attention to the next generation."

Over the next few years, Ericson learned a lot about PCI. San-Vel sent him to the PCI sales school in Chicago, Ill., and he started attending meetings and joining committees. He got so involved that in the mid-1980s, PCI hired him to lead PCI New England (now PCI Northeast), where he interacted with leaders in the departments of transportation across the region. "It was total immersion in PCI," he says.

During those years, Ericson built a strong network among his peers at PCI, counting former PCI research director Dan Jenny, former *PCI Journal* editor-in-chief George Nasser, JVI Inc. president Jim Voss, and PCI technical services vice president Roger Becker among the many industry experts he turned to with questions and appeals for support.

"I learned that it is okay not to have the answer as long as someone in your network does," he says.

In 1988, Ericson left PCI New England to go out on his own as a technical consultant specializing in precast concrete construction systems. He currently represents ReforceTech of Norway, which specializes in various forms of fiber-reinforced concrete and fiber-reinforced-polymer systems, and is known for his expertise in emulative detailing with the NMB Splice-Sleeve System.

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Ericson continued to play an active role at PCI once he started his own company. Along with being named a PCI Fellow in 2002, he has held many roles, including past cochair of the Blast Resistance and Structural Integrity Committee and past chair of the Continuing Education and Student Education Committees, and served on the Seismic and Erectors Committees. He is the vice chair of the FRP Composites Committee, which he says he sees as a great innovation for the industry: "FRP is a new way of thinking about reinforcing precast."

As he looks to the future, he says he is excited about PCI's increased focus on the next generation of members and encourages senior PCI members to reach out to these young professionals before they enter the workplace. "We need to give presentations in the classroom and invite them on tours so they can learn about precast while they are still in college," he says. "It's already happening, but we need to do more to bring them into the industry." 