

## MEET CHUCK MAGNESIO

# Marketing precast concrete

Sarah Fister Gale



Chuck Magnesio started his college career at St. Anselm College, a small Catholic college in Manchester, N.H. He was pursuing a major in math when he discovered a little-known program that allowed St. Anselm students to finish their engineering degrees at the University of

Notre Dame in Indiana.

“Not too many students took advantage of the program,” Magnesio says, but he was keen to spend his final year of college at the famed Indiana university. He was accepted to the program and graduated from Notre Dame with a BS in civil engineering in 1971, as well as a math degree for St. Anselm College.

Despite his double major, Magnesio entered an economy with few job prospects. He had been promised a position at the New York Department of Transportation. The role was eliminated shortly before he graduated, so he moved back in with his parents and spent six months looking for work. “It was heartbreaking,” he says.

During that time, he was called up for the draft to serve in the Vietnam War but failed the physical because of his eyesight. He eventually found a job in Syracuse, N.Y., as a junior engineer for a structural consulting firm, where he spent his days checking shop drawings. “I hated every minute of it,” he says. “I just wanted to be in the field.”

Nine months later, though, precast concrete jump-started his career.

While browsing the local paper, he saw an ad for a structural engineer job at Pyramid Structural System, a small precast concrete plant owned by a mall developer in town. Magnesio had taken only one class in prestressed concrete and knew almost nothing about the material, but he bluffed his way through the interview and landed the job.

It was a big shift, he says. “I was by myself learning every day.” He loved that he got to stay with projects from start to finish, overseeing drawings, plant production, quality control, and erection. “I got to do a little bit of everything, even shovel concrete.”

He worked for Pyramid for several years until the company went out of business one Christmas Eve in the mid-1970s, and Magnesio was back to job hunting. He found a job working for Northeast Concrete Products in Boston, Mass., designing and selling bridges and parking structures. This lasted for a few years until Harold Nelson of Unistress Corp. in Pittsfield, Mass., hired him.

Nelson was the first industry leader to introduce Magnesio to PCI, and Magnesio quickly became an active member, working on committees and attending conferences. It made a big impact on his life and career, he says. “I took it upon myself to make every meeting, even with a heavy workload.”

Then one day in 1996, Magnesio was skiing in Vail, Colo., with Jim Voss, a PCI colleague and owner of JVI Inc. in Lincolnwood, Ill. “Jim and I knew each other from working on the same PCI committees,” Magnesio says. Voss was looking for an engineer to design and market a new product. Voss asked if Magnesio could recommend anyone. Instead, Magnesio suggested Voss hire him. By the time they got to the top of the mountain, he had a new job.

Magnesio has worked at JVI ever since and is now the senior vice president of engineering and technical marketing. He has continued to be active in the PCI community and worked on many committees over the years but says he feels he made the biggest impact on the Marketing Council, where he helped generate new approaches to promoting the industry and its products.

He also credits PCI with expanding the way he thinks about business and his own engineering activities. “PCI is a network of people who understand where the industry is going,” he says. “They have helped me think out of the box.” Whether that involved imagining wider double tees or embracing design-build contracts, being a part of PCI helped him to be more innovative and willing to take calculated risks.

As he looks to the future, he says he hopes PCI members will put more effort into attracting the next generation to the industry. “Our industry needs engineers. We also need architects and engineers to know about precast. The way you do both is by contributing to the PCI Foundation.” 