

Learning Never Stops



Brian Miller,
P.E., LEED AP
Executive Editor
bmiller@pci.org

It is a fast-paced, interesting world we live in today. Just when you think you have things figured out, and maybe even under control, it seems like you have to adapt and learn something new to keep up. I can remember when I used to pick up a device called a telephone, and using a rotary dial, actually had to remember a person's phone number in order to call him or her. Today, I just need to know that number 1 calls my wife.

The reality is that learning never stops. We must continue to learn, adapt and evolve with the world around us. There is always something new to learn and an improved way of doing things.

This proves very true when we think about education. That is why this issue of *Ascent* is focused on learning facilities. The students, the learning environment, and the approach to learning have changed. Today kids have computers, the internet, Facebook, and X-box 360s, and they communicate via text message rather than face-to-face. Sometimes I wonder as my son sits in the same room as his friend and they are texting each other; is the art of conversation going to be lost?

The learning environment must adapt as well in order to keep pace—and this includes construction. As an industry, we are learning about sustainable design and construction practices and have placed more emphasis on indoor environmental quality (IEQ), energy efficiency, water efficiency, acoustics, and even functional resilience. This means that we cannot build schools and higher education structures as we have in the past. Along with the students, our designs, materials and systems must also change.

How do these changes impact the structures we design and build? Architect Patrick Glenn discusses some of these challenges in the Perspective section on page 26 of this issue of *Ascent*.

Precast concrete has a lot to contribute to building schools and higher education structures that meet these newer requirements and goals. For example, high performance precast concrete insulated sandwich wall panels have evolved. Today these great envelope systems can provide edge-to-edge insulation and use a variety of new wythe connectors that essentially eliminate thermal bridging. Hence, this is very important in developing an energy-efficient building envelope. When you add in the thermal mass capability, along with all of the other benefits of precast concrete, this becomes an optimal system to build with. And you still can have the real brick and stone facade that many schools and universities desire, or require. You can learn about these systems in the *High Performance Precast Insulated Sandwich Wall Panel Designers Notebook* on page 51 in this issue, which qualifies for 1 LU of continuing education credit.

You can also read about IEQ, learn about designing and funding FEMA-compliant storm shelters as part of learning facilities, and see some great examples of how architects and engineers have used precast concrete to help meet their design and program goals.

Years ago, I never would have guessed that I would learn how to use an iPad, text, maintain social media accounts, and play Angry Birds, but the process of learning continues. So as you enjoy reading this issue of *Ascent*, I am sure you will learn something new. G2G, TTYL.



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On the cover: Tucker High School (see page 33)

- **Executive Editor:** Brian Miller, P.E., LEED AP
- **Managing Editor:** Craig Shutt
- **Editorial Staff:** Thomas Irvin
- **Editorial Administration:** Jennifer Peters
- **Art Director:** Paul Grigonis
- **Graphic Design:** Ed Derwent
- **Ad Sales:**
Kirstin Osgood
Manager, Sales and Member Development
kosgood@pci.org
(312) 360-3206

- **Reprint Sales:** Paul Grigonis, Art Director
(312) 360-3217
pgrigonis@pci.org
- **Precast/Prestressed Concrete Institute:**
James G. Toscas, President
- **Industry Technical Review Team:** Jay Cariveau, Peter Finsen, Sidney Freedman, Corey Greika, Marty McIntyre, Mark McKenry, Brian Miller and Greg Winkler
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- If you have a project to be considered, send information to Whitney Stephens, PCI Communications Manager, (312) 428-4945, wstephens@pci.org