



MEET MARIO BERTOLINI

Raising the bar

Sarah Fister Gale

Tireless efforts to bring attention, certification, and research to the industry help make concrete a viable material for all types of building projects

Early in his career, Mario Bertolini almost made a decision that changed his career path, and possibly the precast concrete industry. After he graduated from the University of Connecticut's civil engineering program, C. W. Blakeslee and Sons hired Bertolini in 1958 as a project engineer for the company's heavy construction division.

"I wanted to spend the rest of my career in heavy construction," Bertolini says.

In 1960, C. W. Blakeslee was having trouble with quality control at its prestressing and precasting plant outside of New Haven, Conn. The president of the company asked Bertolini to take over the quality control position. Bertolini almost quit rather than make the move to the quality control side of the business, but he decided to give it a go.

The concrete industry was slow at the time but steadily grew along with Bertolini's career. In 1961 he became a manager, in 1962 he took over management of the whole plant, and by 1965 he was division production manager.

"It was an exciting time for everyone in the industry," Bertolini says. "The best part was taking jobs that were designed for steel and converting them to precast concrete."

Changing hands

As the 1960s neared an end, however, another big change was afoot for Bertolini. Westinghouse Electric bought C. W. Blakeslee in 1969. Then, in the early 1970s, the construction market fell apart. Westinghouse began selling off the Blakeslee divisions in pieces.

Determined not to lose his place in the industry, Bertolini found a private investor and bought the precast concrete division of the company in 1976. He has operated it as Blakeslee Prestress Inc. ever since.

Blakeslee Prestress has continued to be a major presence in the precast, prestressed concrete industry, steadily growing to a \$50 million-a-year business under Bertolini's guidance.

Concrete and earthquakes

Bertolini served as chairman of PCI in 1989. He served on the board of directors for two terms and as chair of several PCI committees over the years, including the Seismic Committee from 1990 to 2002.

Because of the Seismic Committee's efforts over the years, precast concrete is gaining popularity as a construction material in high-seismic areas.

"The research engineers on the committee did all the hard work. They are forward-thinking, visionary people. I just ran the meetings," Bertolini says.

Future of precast concrete

He attributes the industry's success and growing market to its reputation for delivering quality, durable materials, and he does take some credit for

that. "Blakeslee realized in the '70s that for precast to be a major force, we had to produce the best-quality products."

Blakeslee was one of the first companies to push for PCI certification for precast concrete material construction.

"Not everyone was on board at first," he says, "but we dragged them along in our wake."

He also thinks that the industry needs new blood with additional skills.

"The construction industry has become much more complex than it once was, with construction managers pushing more and more responsibility down to the major subcontractors," Bertolini says. "As a result, the management skills required to run a precast company are much more demanding."

Mario Bertolini

Industry improvements Spurring the PCI certification program and helping develop precast concrete's reputation as a high-quality product.

Upcoming challenges Bertolini says we must expand our markets into all types of buildings and bring in new blood with strong management skills.

Advice We are only limited by what designers think we can do.

About the author

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