



MEET SIDNEY FREEDMAN

Envisioning a future in precast

Sarah Fister Gale

Sid Freedman's poor eyesight helped make him a visionary in the precast concrete industry.

Best known for his decades of work with PCI, which culminated most recently with the release of the third edition of *Architectural Precast Concrete*, Freedman spent the early years of his life dreaming of a completely different kind of career.

From the time he was a young boy, Freedman imagined that one day he would join the military. But because of his weak vision, "I couldn't pass the physical," he says of his application to the United States Military Academy at West Point, N.Y.

Freedman instead went to college, attending Northeastern University in Boston, Mass., where he pursued a civil engineering degree. "I figured I'd get my degree at Northeastern, then I'd get my commission and I could still make the military my career," he says.

He was accepted into the Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) program and was doing well in his civil engineering courses. Then in his junior year, "I realized, why the heck would I want to spend the rest of my life having someone else lead my career?" he laughs.

When he graduated in 1957, he took a six-month commission and went into the reserves for seven and a half years.

Once out of the service, he returned to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, where he had worked in a co-op position during college. He liked the work, he says, but found that most of his colleagues were close to retirement. "It was no place for a young graduate," Freedman says.

Instead, he took a job as a sales engineer in Baltimore, Md., for a company called Zonolite, which was later purchased and became W. R. Grace. When the company restructured, he reached out to the National Concrete Masonry Association (NCMA), looking for a sales job. Instead, he was offered a job running the group's brand-new research lab.

Freedman might have stayed at NCMA for his whole career, but in 1965 the group threatened to shut down the lab, forcing him to evaluate his options. The most appealing offer came from the Portland Cement Association (PCA).

Freedman accepted a Structural Bureau job in August 1965 under the guidance of W. Burr Bennet. Freedman stayed with PCA for seven and a half years, ultimately becoming manager of the Concrete Technology Sector.

In March 1973, Bennet hired Freedman as the manager of architectural precast concrete services at PCI. Freedman is still with PCI 34 years later.

Freedman was coeditor and the principal author of the fourth edition of the *Manual for Quality Control for Plants and Production of Architectural Precast Concrete Products*. He was also actively involved with the PCI

Manual for Structural Design of Architectural Precast Concrete and the *PCI Drafting Handbook: Precast and Prestressed Concrete*.

"We are always trying to educate producers in areas that are germane to precast," he says of his commitment to these committees and publications.

His proudest accomplishment, however, is the new *Architectural Precast Concrete* manual, which he's worked on intermittently for the past 10 years. "It's a culmination of putting everything about precast together that we didn't have before," he says.

Over the past three decades, Freedman has seen the future in precast concrete and has helped usher it into the mainstream construction industry.

Sidney Freedman

Industry challenges Environmental issues from sandblasting, acid etching, and other finishes. "The industry may face environmental restrictions in the future in the way they use certain materials and that could hinder the promotion of some finishes," Freedman says.

Advice to the industry Find alternative ways to deliver the colors and finishes. "You have to be prepared to deliver the same appearances and finishes while eliminating environmental concerns," he says.

Most recent award Sid Freedman was named one of the 2007 Influencers of the Year by *Concrete Producer* magazine.

About the author

Sarah Fister Gale of Fister Quarries is a freelance journalist based in Chicago, Ill. 