

MEET BOB MAST

Explorer at heart

K. Michelle Burgess

Bob Mast has dedicated his energy and attention to one of the great loves of his life, precast/prestressed concrete, since 1959.

"I had heard of two brothers in Tacoma, Washington, that were doing wonderful things with the new material of prestressed concrete," Mast says. "I found out who they were and took a job with them. I intended to stay two years and learn all I could, but I never stopped learning, so I never left."

Mast, cofounder of BERGER/ABAM Engineers Inc. headquartered in Federal Way, Wash., and senior principal and director of engineering development, says that he does not foresee full retirement unless health would require it.

"It's been a very nice place to work. It still is. I don't have any reason to leave," Mast says. "Fifty years on this job, and I think age 75 is a good time to slow down a little anyway. I don't envision myself ever leaving the industry completely."

His passion for his work is evident, and he has only more recently reduced his office hours.

"My job has pretty much been my life," Mast says. "It's not as completely my life as it used to be."

His natural curiosity and problem-solving mentality drove him to develop the shear-friction principle and practical and widely used methods for reinforcing joint and connection areas. Mast's contributions include developing and performing confirmation load testing for the BERGER/ABAM pile-supported, precast concrete, overwater cargo pier concept, which is now a standard design in the western United States.

"I think building and making things just always appealed to me," Mast says. "Early on I realized that in the construction industry you follow projects through from beginning to end, unlike aerospace, where you're working on one tiny part of a problem."

The project he is most proud of is the Monorail at Walt Disney World in Orlando, Fla.

"It's a very glamorous thing to be associated with," Mast says. "After working on the Seattle monorail in 1961 ... I could see a lot of room for improvement and was anxious to incorporate those ideas into the Disney project, which began in 1969. I feel that the structure we did there is very elegant."

Precast/prestressed concrete was not his first diversion, though. He has been fascinated by astronomy since he was 10. In 1944, Mast fell from a tree that he was climbing and broke his leg. While his leg mended, he read a book on astronomy that captured his imagination. He has been infatuated with the subject ever since.

Then, in his 50s, Mast took up hiking and climbing. He has climbed Mt. Whitney and Mt. Rainier, among other mountaineering feats.

"I'm an explorer at heart," Mast says. "Many people would not think of designing something. I'm eager to find out where it leads me. The calculation as well as where the trail leads me, the mountains."

Hiking is not the only more recent adventure that Mast has embarked on. On Christmas day in 1993, Mast met Marilyn, whom he married in 1995. 

Bob Mast



Education After earning a bachelor's degree in architectural engineering from the University of Illinois in 1957, he served two years in the army.

Mentors He considers his parents mentors in the sense that they gave him the background that he needed to succeed in life. Arthur Anderson, one of the partners in Anderson and Anderson (eventually to become BergerABAM), inspired him in the area of engineering, particularly prestressed concrete.

Surviving a downturn During an economic slowdown in 1981, his company decided that in order to survive, it would need to get work outside. "Fortunately, we had a couple of key technologies that we could market nationally," Mast says.

Retirement "The key is to provide opportunities to make use of the older employees without having to force them to be on the schedule of a hardworking, young full-time employee," Mast says. "My value is in deciding whether what they ran on the computer is correct or not."

Bob Mast discusses astronomy and mounting climbing in "A Man for All Seasons" in the January–February 1989 issue of *PCI Journal*. The article is available online.