

MEET DAN JENNY

A life in trades

Sarah Fister Gale

Retired PCI technical director Dan Jenny was born to be an engineer.

"It was in my blood," says the retired precast concrete industry veteran, who spent 24 years on the staff of PCI as technical director, research director, and vice president.

His love of engineering began as a child watching his father work on railroad construction crews in Milwaukee, Wis. As he got older, he took extra courses in science and math to put him ahead, ensuring that he would be accepted to Marquette University's five-year co-op civil engineering program in 1939, where he coincidentally wound up being supervised by his father.

World War II was on when Jenny completed his degree, and in 1943, two weeks after graduation, he joined the Navy, where he spent three years supervising installments of guns, radar, and electronic equipment at the Boston Naval Shipyard.

"I was the greenest officer in the U.S. Navy," he says.

He may have been green, but that military experience landed him a job with Fluor Construction when he got out in 1946, and it gave him the opportunity to go back to school on the GI Bill in 1948 to pursue a master's degree in civil and structural engineering at the University of Minnesota.

When Jenny graduated in 1949, there were not a lot of jobs for advanced civil engineers.

Frustrated by the lack of opportunities in Wisconsin, he got a letter of recommendation from a professor who sent him to the Portland Cement Association (PCA) in Skokie, Ill., with the suggestion that the organization might recommend him to a local engineering firm.

Jenny went to PCA, but instead of giving him a recommendation, they offered him a job as their new structural engineer.

"At that time I didn't even know what a trade association was," he says, "but it turns out I would spend my whole career working for them."

During his years at PCA, he was introduced to prestressed concrete while working under his mentor, Thor Germundsson, who developed early design procedures for prestressed concrete that he shared with field engineers in seminars. "He would develop them and give them to me to read and review," Jenny says.

Jenny spent eleven years with PCA, four of them in the association's Washington, D.C., office. Then he spent another six years in Washington working for the Shale Clay and Slate Institute. After 10 years there, Jenny and his wife, Beatrice, wanted to get back to their midwestern roots.

Fortunately, at that time Bob Lyman, then director of PCI, was spending some time in Washington and was looking for a technical director. The two men met at a trade association coffee event, where Lyman asked Jenny to recommend a possible candidate, but Jenny had other plans.

"By the end of 1966, I was back in Chicago and working with PCI," he says.

Jenny's early days at PCI were lean times. "There was a lot to do and not a lot of staff," he says.

Over the next two and a half decades, Jenny helped shape the association, developing quality-control and safety manuals and putting on the annual convention. He also helped expand the technical committee structure and added more committees. Then, in 1971, he compiled the first *PCI Design Handbook*.

Jenny later went on to become PCI's research director, and in 1987 he was named acting executive director for a term. He retired in 1990 and stayed active in the association for several more years.

When Jenny thinks about his career, he marvels at all that he was able to accomplish. "My growth in the industry was expedited by my trade association work," he says. "In a trade association you do so many things. It's a great opportunity to learn and grow."

Dan Jenny



Advice "You have to buckle down and work hard, but you can't be afraid to tackle the challenges put in front of you."

Future opportunities "Aging infrastructure is a major problem in this country, and our industry can provide the materials to address that."

About the author

Sarah Fister Gale of Fister Quarries is a freelance journalist based in Chicago, Ill. [n](#)