

MEET NEAL ANDERSON

Leveling up

Sarah Fister Gale



Neal Anderson wanted to be in construction since he was a child. Growing up in Sugar Grove, Ill., he loved big construction sites and watching bridges, roads, and buildings emerge from the ground. So when he graduated from high school, the next obvious step was to get a

degree in civil engineering.

He attended Purdue University, his father's alma mater, where he initially planned to get his bachelor's degree then start working. The summer before his senior year, he landed an internship with Wiss, Janney, Elstner Associates (WJE) on a project in Manhattan near Madison Square Garden. That is when everything changed.

"I was this small-town kid working in New York City with these amazing engineers," Anderson says. He was impressed by their skills and knowledge, and it made him realize that a bachelor's degree wasn't going to get him to their level. "That's when I knew that if I wanted to do more in the field, I needed a master's degree."

He stayed at Purdue for two more years. During this time he was first introduced to precast, prestressed concrete in a class led by Doug Sutton. "He was an amazing teacher," Anderson says. As part of the curriculum, Sutton gave every student a *PCI Design Handbook: Precast and Prestressed Concrete* and encouraged them all to get student memberships. Anderson signed up, and he has been a member ever since.

As part of the degree program, Anderson conducted research on the shear behavior of stirrups in concrete members and eventually completed his master's thesis under Professor Julio Ramirez.

When he graduated in 1986, Anderson returned to WJE, where he worked as a structural engineer for 21 years. He was extensively involved in the rehabilitation of reinforced and precast, prestressed concrete, working on many bridge superstructure and deck repair projects.

One of the most noteworthy was the massive rehabilitation of the Chicago & Northwestern Railway station,

which included a three-block-long elevated bridge and precast concrete platform. "It was the biggest project of my career."

During that time, Anderson also served as one of the principal investigators, along with Don Meinheit, of PCI's extensive research program on the behavior and design criteria of headed stud anchorages. "I became a lot more involved with PCI," he says.

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He and Meinheit made frequent presentations about their work to the research committee, where he built relationships with a number of PCI members. He recalls Harry Gleich encouraging him to attend a PCI Industry Handbook Committee meeting, and soon after he became a member of the committee.

"Harry and Don 'volun-told' me to join," he says, laughing, but he was grateful for the push. Being an active part of PCI taught him the value of giving back to the community. "Harry and Don led by example and showed me the value of volunteering my time to make the industry better."

Anderson eventually left WJE in 2008 to try new things. He spent five years as vice president of engineering for the Concrete Reinforcing Steel Institute before becoming a staff consultant for Simpson Gumpertz & Heger (SGH), in Chicago. Now he spends his days rehabbing vintage structural steel and reinforced precast concrete structures. He is also still actively involved in PCI, attending Committee Days and participating in task groups.

He says he hopes that the next generation of students to enter the industry will take a similarly active role and seek out mentors in PCI's community of experts.

"When you come out of college you think you know a lot, but you really don't," he says. "If you are humble and willing to ask questions, you can learn something new every day." 