



Going West for precast

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Gary Wildung may love the mountains of Colorado today, but he started life as a true New Yorker.

Wildung was born and raised in New York City, attending PS 81 in Queens until sixth grade, when his family moved to Long Island. “It was like moving to the country back then,” he says. He finished high school, then returned to the city to attend the New York Institute of Technology, where he received a bachelor’s degree in architecture in 1973.

He imagined starting a career in architecture, but when he graduated jobs were scarce. At the time, he knew nothing about precast concrete, but a job offer at Abrahams & Karp, a precast concrete consulting firm in Lynbrook, intrigued him. “I liked the way the pieces all fit together like a big puzzle,” he says.

Wildung took the job, which was the first step in a storied career in precast concrete. He worked for the company until the recession hit, then took a position at Grand Prestress Corp. He began as a drafter but quickly moved to quality control and later to managing the pipe plant where he oversaw production of precast concrete manhole covers, utility boxes, and other elements.

In 1976, Wildung was happy in the job, but by that point he was growing disillusioned with his hometown. “Businesses were corrupt, and the mafia was involved in everything.” He took a break and visited an old friend out West. That’s when everything changed. “I fell in love with Colorado,” he says.

Wildung’s friend was working at Stanley Structures in Denver, Colo., and when Wildung visited the company they offered him a job on the spot. He initially said no and returned to New York but couldn’t stop thinking about the opportunity.

Within a year, he called his friend and left a message asking if the job was still available. Then he packed his bags and started driving. “By the time I got to St. Louis, I had the job,” he says.

Wildung stayed with Stanley Structures for more than a decade. When Rocky Mountain Prestress acquired the company in 1988, Wildung took a job with Leap Associates, at its new office in Denver. He stayed with Leap for two years, but it never felt like the perfect fit. So he found a friend with some money to invest, and together they launched FDG Inc., a precast concrete engineering and drafting company based in Denver.

Within weeks they landed their first job, and it was big. FDG was hired to design the MGM Grand Hotel in Las Vegas, Nev. “Initially it was going to look like the Emerald City, with

glass spires and intricate plating work,” he says. The project was expected to take all of FDG’s time for 18 months, so Wildung didn’t look for any other projects. Then a few months in, the client got an estimate for the glass spires. “It was way over budget,” he says. Within two days, the entire project was shut down.

With no work and no prospects, Wildung called a colleague at Stresscon to see if they needed any help and the timing was perfect. They had just landed a project to build the new Mesa County Justice Facility in Grand Junction, Colo., and needed a design consultant to detail the project. Wildung delivered a price the next day, and within days they were back to work. “After that, we let people know what we were doing, and the rest is history,” he says.

By 1998, FDG had 28 people working in a precast concrete office building they had built themselves. The company quickly gained a reputation for quality craftsmanship and an attention to detail that has kept it busy for three decades.

Wildung also attributes FDG’s success to the strong network he built through PCI. He first joined PCI during his days at Leap and went on to become one of its most prolific members.

Wildung joined the Erectors Committee in 1993 and headed up one of the three fast teams that wrote the second edition of the *Erector’s Manual: Standards and Guidelines for the Erection of Precast Concrete Products*. He was also a member of the Erector Certification Task Group, helped to create the T. Henry Clark Award in 2011, has worked on the Quality Enhancement and Marketing QA Committee for years, and chairs the Quality Activities Council. He was named a PCI Fellow in 2011.

Although Wildung retired in 2018, he continues to act as a liaison to PCI for FDG. Most recently, he worked on the Architectural Certification Subcommittee to help develop the new PCI Architectural Certification Program. For years, all precast concrete architectural products beyond architectural trim fell under a single certification category. The new program allows categories to be selected based on project finish and complexity requirements. “Creating architectural categories was long overdue,” he says. “We are very proud of this work.”

Wildung says he believes the new program will attract more architects to the material. “Hopefully we can get our industry into the single-family housing market soon, which can easily double the size of our industry,” he says. “All in all, the precast industry has a very bright future.” **D**