



## MEET KENNETH KRUSE

# Forming a market

Sarah Fister Gale



Kenneth Kruse could have built a career around any industry he wanted, but once he discovered precast concrete, he was done looking.

"I was absolutely fascinated with precast," Kruse says of his first experience with the material. "It was so cool, and you could

build so many things with it."

Kruse was born and raised in Cincinnati, Ohio, the youngest of seven siblings. He received his bachelor's and master's degrees from the University of Cincinnati, where he participated in the school's co-op program working every other semester for industry organizations, including Proctor & Gamble. "Not many schools offer co-op programs anymore, but it was a great experience," he says.

Shortly after graduating, Kruse landed a job with BASF, the world's largest chemical producer, with subsidiaries in more than 80 countries. BASF's talent development model encourages new hires to work for a time in several business units to help them build a network and find their area of interest. Kruse's first assignment was in construction chemicals, which mostly focused on cast-in-place concrete.

At the time, BASF was already a leading supplier of chemicals for ready-mixed concrete, so Kruse went looking for other industries to support. That's when he found PCI. "I went to my first PCI Convention, and I was hooked," he says.

He immediately saw the cost and quality benefits that precast concrete designs brought to a project, and he liked that it was adaptable enough to be used in a variety of projects, such as hotels, bridges, and parking structures. "It had such a great value proposition," he says.

He was surprised that precast concrete didn't have a larger market share but found most of the stakeholders were engineers who weren't trained in how to market their products effectively. So Kruse decided to help them.

He let his bosses know that he wanted to stay in construction materials and focus on the precast concrete industry. Then he spent the next 35 years working with PCI and precast concrete manufacturers to expand the industry and broadcast the story of what precast concrete can do.

Early on he met with Tom Battles, who was the president and CEO of PCI at the time, to talk about market share and how the industry could double its sales potential with the right

marketing. Battles agreed and encouraged Kruse to act as an ambassador for the industry and to meet with PCI members to discuss how they could expand their market presence.

Kruse met with PCI board members and local leaders and gave presentations at dozens of PCI events to share his message: "If you merge technology and strategy, you can dominate the industry."

He eventually launched the Market Research and Metrics Committee with the goal of measuring the industry's market share. The idea was to quantify how much business PCI members were conducting in what segments and to define the percentage of the marketplace that work represented so they would have a baseline to grow that number.

At first, members were wary. Kruse recalls presenting the committee idea in a PCI meeting and asking the 45 participants in the room to sign up if they were interested in participating.

"We didn't get a single name," he says. Still, Kruse pushed forward, conducting surveys and talking with members about the products they made and the geographies and segments they served to get a sense of the industry's scale. He also asked them questions about revenue and pay scales to get a sense of how competitive the industry was compared with other areas of construction as a way to improve industry recruiting.

Many members were hesitant to share those numbers, even anonymously, but eventually Kruse persuaded them to participate. Over the years, the data has helped PCI members rethink their business strategies, which helped the industry grow and attract new talent, including a more diverse pool of engineers. Today, the Market Research and Metrics Committee captures detailed data about sales and market share by segment, including bridges, residence halls, churches, and prisons. Members use this data to build more effective business strategies. "We had a rough beginning, but we worked it out," he says.

Kruse went on to participate on many more committees, including the Digital Marketing Committee, Emerging Markets Committee, and Residential Market Team, and held positions on the PCI Board of Directors. He is a Fellow of PCI and the Canadian Precast/Prestressed Concrete Association.

Kruse retired last year and never regretted making precast concrete the focus on his career. "I'm proud I made that decision," he says. "I got to work with the people who built this industry, and I still love the technology and everything precast can do." 