



MEET Lee Lawrence

Solving precast concrete problems

William Atkinson



Lee Lawrence, regional director and senior principal with Wiss, Janney, Elstner Associates (WJE), an engineering, architectural, and materials sciences firm, was born in Florida but ended up spending the majority of his childhood and subsequent adult life in Central Texas, primarily

the Austin area.

Lawrence attended the University of Texas at Austin starting in 1982, majoring in civil engineering with an emphasis on structures and materials for both his BS and MS degrees.

His interest in the industry stemmed from working with family. “My father was a concrete contractor, and I spent several summers working for his company,” Lawrence says. “This was my first exposure to the concrete construction industry, and it certainly helped motivate me to stay in school but also fired up my interest in the industry.”

After college and prior to joining WJE, Lawrence worked for a highway contractor for a few years and for the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) for almost 12 years. “Both of these jobs included significant amounts of concrete-related work,” he says.

Lawrence left TxDOT in 1999 to join WJE, a firm with which he had become familiar while working for TxDOT. “While at TxDOT, we had retained WJE to provide consulting services to help us mitigate a new type of concrete issue called delayed ettringite formation,” he says. “Prior to TxDOT retaining WJE, I was unaware of the problem-solving field of engineering. I became fascinated with the practice of solving complex structural and material problems in structures, in particular, concrete structures.” Lawrence says that when he decided it was time to make a move from TxDOT, he was fortunate enough to get an opportunity to join WJE and pursue his new passion there.

Lawrence began at WJE as an entry-level project manager and was then given the opportunity to help establish and serve as the unit manager of the WJE Austin office. He served in this role until 2014, when he was given the opportunity to build the company’s new practice development function. “A couple of years later I also became the executive director of our South Region, a position I still hold,” he says.

When it comes to his involvement with PCI, Lawrence credits John Dick, former PCI director of transportation sys-

tems, for helping him become familiar with the organization. “I was fortunate to be recruited into PCI by John Dick in the mid-1990s while I was serving as a director in the Structural Group of TxDOT’s Materials & Tests Division,” he says. “In this role, I oversaw a group of engineers and technicians who handled TxDOT’s quality assurance responsibilities for all prefabricated concrete products used in the highway infrastructure. John recruited me into PCI’s Plant Certification Committee, where I served for a number of years and contributed to revision efforts of MNL 116 and 117 QC/QA Manuals,” the *Manual for Quality Control for Plants and Production of Structural Precast Concrete Products* and *Manual for Quality Control for Plants and Production of Architectural Precast Concrete Products*, respectively.

Once Lawrence joined PCI, he found many new opportunities to contribute to the organization and, thus, the industry and profession. “John’s effort to recruit me and my subsequent participation on the Plant Certification Committee had a significant impact on me both professionally and personally,” he says. “It was a wonderful and talented group of committee members, and having the opportunity to work with them ultimately led and inspired me to focus most of my professional activities through PCI.”

Lawrence has filled a number of roles in PCI, include serving on the Concrete Materials Technology Committee, which he chaired for six years. He was also a member of the PCI Technical Activities Council for six years and has been on the Research and Development Council for the past five years. “I was also the technical editor of the third edition of MNL 116,” he says.

Asked what he enjoys most about the precast concrete industry, Lawrence says, “Aside from the fact that it is such an amazing and important construction material, I have greatly enjoyed having the opportunity to work in many different capacities of the industry for essentially my entire career.”

His favorite precast concrete project was the Veterans Memorial Bridge that was constructed adjacent to the Rainbow Bridge in Beaumont, Tex., starting in 1988. “This was my first precast project as a young engineer with TxDOT that involved inspection of the fabrication of the segmental box girders in Victoria, Texas. It was a fascinating and challenging project and was a great learning experience on many different fronts.” 