

Contributing to the bridge community

Bridges are a lot more than infrastructure. They are a fundamental part of humanity. They are connections, connections between communities, between economies, and between families and cultures. When people seek to build a community or a society, the first thing that gets built are bridges. In war, the first things destroyed are bridges and they are the first things to be rebuilt. This is the aspect of bridges that all of humanity understands.

There is another aspect of bridges that is equally important but less understood. The bridge community itself is a group that reflects what we build. The owners, designers, builders, and inspectors in the bridge community exhibit some of the best traits of the structures we produce. We are a connected group of people who work together using our own specific talents to contribute to projects that are essential to a functioning society.

I have been fortunate enough to travel around the world to learn about bridge projects. Perhaps the most fascinating aspect has been meeting the people behind the projects. There are so many intelligent, hardworking people who are hyper focused on building the best projects they can build. In addition to the enthusiasm and energy that goes into the work, there is also a deep and heavy understanding that mistakes we make can be devastating to the people we are working to serve. The best way to prevent mistakes is through collaboration. Perhaps it is this collaboration that makes the bridge community what it is.

PCI has a central role to play in facilitating the bridge community. Prestressed concrete bridges are the most utilized bridge construction type in the United States. PCI hosts American Association of State Transportation and Highway Officials committees, department of transportation representatives, and members of the academic community. Designers, owners, and fabricators gather at PCI events to develop the state of the art in modern bridge construction. PCI sponsors bridge research at the most prominent universities and institutions. By participating in PCI, you are contributing to the bridge community that means so much to all of us.

On another topic, there has been much discussion recently about sustainability in bridge construction and how the bridge community can contribute to sustainability. Some of this has been narrowly focused on carbon emissions. A broader look at sustainability should consider a structure's impact on humanity, society, and the environment. A well-built bridge can protect the environment by spanning well over sensitive wetlands. One recent bridge project had a very large span over a tiny seasonal creek. There was a brief period when construction could take place. The bridge was designed and built to protect the habitat of the endangered Preble's meadow jumping mouse. Prestressed concrete was the best material to build with to protect this habitat. The structure could be built without affecting the stream below. The durability of prestressed girders will ensure that this habitat can remain protected for many generations to come.

Cheers, and keep on building! 📣



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