Going full circle

Mason Nichols

As an intern with the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT) in the summer of 1984, Chuck Wynings wasn't sure where his career path would take him. He says he knew he was interested in engineering—he majored in civil engineering with an emphasis in structural engineering at Pennsylvania State University—but his eventual area of focus remained a mystery.

Wynings' work with PennDOT included a bridge project that used precast, prestressed concrete bridge beams. This project initially piqued Wynings' interest in precast concrete, ultimately leading him to take a course at Penn State focused on prestressed concrete design.

During the course, Helm Wilden, owner of nearby precast concrete engineering firm H. Wilden and Associates (HWA), offered a guest lecture on behalf of the Mid-Atlantic Precast Association (MAPA), now PCI Mid-Atlantic. At the conclusion of Wilden's presentation, he handed out a list of all MAPA precast concrete producers to the class.

"I ended up sending out resumes and cover letters to all of the companies on that list," Wynings says. "After interviewing with one of the companies, I was told they couldn't offer me a position but had taken the liberty of forwarding my resume to Helm Wilden."

Wynings got the job, and his career in the precast concrete industry was cemented.

"Helm taught me so much about precast concrete and the responsibility that comes with being an engineer," Wynings says. "Even now as I take things on, I'll often think, 'How would Helm handle this?' He really left a lasting mark on me."

After a rewarding experience at HWA, Wynings moved on to New Enterprise Stone and Lime Co. (NESL) in Western Pennsylvania. Coincidentally, NESL provided the bridge beams for the project he participated in while he was an intern at PennDOT, providing another full-circle moment.

Wynings spent nearly a decade at NESL, where he came to appreciate the extraordinary amount of coordination, planning, and execution that takes place beyond the design phase of a project, something he had not seen as much of during his engineering-focused days working under HWA.

As Wynings became a more complete engineer through this work at NESL, a chance conversation led to a turning point in his career.

"I was serving on a PCI committee with Greg Force, who was, at the time, the engineering manager of the Virginia Division of Tindall Corporation," Wynings says. "He and I got to talking, and he told me about an opportunity at the Virginia plant. I packed up my family, made the leap, and for the past 26 years have had the pleasure of working with the Tindall Team, particularly the amazing folks at the Virginia Division." Today Wynings serves as general manager emeritus at Tindall Corp.

Over the years, Wynings' positions at HWA, NESL, and Tindall allowed him to expand his knowledge base considerably, but he credits his participation with PCI as key to the impact he has had within the precast concrete industry.

"I've been a part of several PCI committees and have had the opportunity to work with folks like Norm Scott, Bob Mast, and Irwin Speyer," Wynings says. "Having the chance to collaborate with such pioneers while they were still active in our industry was a special privilege."

Wynings' involvement with PCI over the past three decades spans many entities, including the PCI Board of Directors, the Building Code Committee, the Special Inspectors Task Group, the Technical Activities Council and two editions of the *PCI Design Handbook: Precast and Prestressed Concrete*.

Looking back on his career, Wynings says he is proud of many projects that have left a mark on the communities where he has worked. In particular, he pointed to his work on Blair County Ballpark, a minor league baseball stadium in his hometown of Altoona, Pa., that today is known as Peoples Natural Gas Field. As Wynings says, it was a source of pride for him taking his family there to baseball games inside a place he had a hand in making possible.

Moving forward, Wynings says he believes that the precast concrete industry will continue to evolve through the expanded use of manufacturing automation and artificial-intelligence-driven design. Although those will certainly help propel companies forward, power will always remain in networking and the bonds formed between people.

"Just the camaraderie, the fellowship, of spending time with like-minded people in the industry and sharing experiences is so important," he says. "In doing so, you build a collection of friends who are there for the long haul."