

# A force in the industry

Sarah Fister Gale



As a native of Williamsburg, Va., Greg Force spent his youth playing the fife in the fife and drum corps at the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation. After spending seven years acting out militia scenes and giving tours of one of the historic buildings, his fully expected to attend the University of

Virginia in Charlottesville so he could stay close to home.

As college acceptance decision time approached, Force changed his plans. He had also been accepted to Lehigh University's College of Engineering and Applied Science in Bethlehem, Pa, and at the last minute he chose Lehigh. "I was pretty homesick at first, but I wanted to be independent," he says.

At Lehigh, he discovered civil engineering and was instantly hooked. "It made me want to get involved in construction," he says. Like many of his peers, he found work in the steel industry after he graduated, but it was the late 1970s and the steel industry was starting to falter.

When the recession hit in the 1980s, he realized he needed to expand his skill set. Having passed his professional engineering exam while working in Louisiana, he relocated to Georgia and completed his MBA at Georgia College and State University. It was in Georgia that Force first discovered precast concrete when he was hired as an entry-level engineer for Macon Prestressed.

Force says he had little interest in concrete design and construction going back to his college days, but he saw the job as a chance to hone his design skills and stay in Georgia to finish his degree so he took it. It was the turning point for his career.

"I loved that job," he says. Unlike many engineering roles, Force got to touch every aspect of the projects he worked on, from creating designs to working with fabricators to making sure the pieces fit together in the field. "There was a real sense of pride in being a part of that."

Two years later, Bob Finfrock, owner of Finfrock Industries, a precast concrete facility in Orlando, Fla., offered Force the role of chief engineer. Force was 29 at the time, and he couldn't pass it up.

Finfrock became Force's mentor, teaching him about the industry and helping him mature as a designer. He also encouraged Force to join PCI in 1985. "It was the pantheon of

precast industry leaders," he says of his first PCI convention. "I was awed." At Finfrock's urging, Force sat in on technical meetings and introduced himself to the leaders he met at the events. "I couldn't believe how receptive they were to this young guy just feeling his way into the industry," Force says.

Force's career was thriving, but in 1988, family concerns prompted a decision to move his family closer to the area where he and his wife were from. At the time, Tindall Corp. was building a new precast concrete plant in Petersburg, Va., and it offered Force a job as chief engineer. He was later promoted to vice president and general manager and eventually to his current role as president and chief executive officer at the headquarters in Spartanburg, S.C. "It's been a great company, and I've worked with an amazing team," he says. "Having the opportunity to work for a visionary and industry leader like Bill Lowndes has had a tremendous impact on me both personally and professionally."

Throughout his career, Force has stayed active at PCI. He joined several technical committees during his career and eventually was invited to become a member of the Technical Activities Council. In 2002, Force was named a PCI Fellow and in 2014, he was named a PCI Titan. He was also named chair of the Justice Facilities Committee, the Industry Handbook Committee for the seventh edition of the *PCI Design Handbook: Precast and Prestressed Concrete* and chair of the Parking Structures Committee for the second edition of the *Recommended Practice for Design and Construction of Precast Prestressed Parking Structures*. Force was chairman of the PCI Board of Directors in 2012.

"I met so many great people through PCI and learned so much from them," he says. "They are willing to talk you through any problem or technical issue, and many of them became my close friends."

He says that the committee work wasn't always easy and took a lot of time, but it was worth it. "If you put in the effort, you get so much more back," he says. He says he is eager to see the next generation of precasters take active roles in the association and keep coming up with innovative solutions that will maintain the industry's relevance. "We need to keep pushing boundaries and bringing new solutions to market," he says. "That will be our legacy." 