

Placing yourself in precast

Sarah Fister Gale



Tim Salmons has always been connected to the precast concrete industry. When he was just a boy, he attended annual meetings at Wilson Concrete in Red Oak, Iowa, where his father sat on the board, and recalls pheasant hunting with Charles Wilson, one of the founding members of PCI. “I got to

know him when I was still just a kid,” he says.

Salmons later attended the University of Missouri in Columbia, where he didn’t initially plan to get an engineering degree but found himself drawn to the program. His father had studied civil engineering and taught classes at the University of Missouri, and Salmons eventually followed in his footsteps. “I couldn’t find a better way to make a living,” he says. “I guess engineering is in my blood.”

He graduated in 1984 with a bachelor’s degree in civil engineering, and after a short stint with the Missouri Department of Transportation, he took a job at Wilson Concrete in Kansas City, Kans., where his father was also working. “It wasn’t an engineering position,” he says. Instead, he was in charge of the loading crews and scheduling plant production.

“I couldn’t find a better way to make a living. I guess engineering is in my blood.”

After a year, he took a position at a testing lab in Kansas, where he drove an old mail truck around the region, testing concrete, inspecting reinforcing bar placement, and testing asphalt compaction during the building boom. “It was great exposure, and I did a lot of special inspections,” he says. But after a while, Salmons got antsy. He spent another couple of years working at Prestressed Casting Co. in Springfield, Mo., then relocated to Albuquerque, N.Mex., for a job with Ferreri Concrete Structures. “I finally found a place that was a great fit.”

At Ferreri, Salmons did drafting and engineering work and consulted with clients on design-build projects. “I loved taking a building from idea through designs, drafting, fabrication,

production, and erection,” he says. “It’s easy to get enthusiastic about a project when you are involved with every aspect of it.”

During that time, he also finished his master’s degree in civil engineering at the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque. “I never aspired to be a professor or to get my doctorate, but a bachelor’s degree just gives you the bare minimum of knowledge,” he says. “I wanted a deeper understanding of the engineering practice.”

Then in 1997, his father decided to set up his own structural engineering company in Missouri and invited his son to join in with him. Salmons gave Ferreri his notice, and before leaving secured a contract with his former employer to use Salmons PC for its engineering work. Ferreri became Salmons’ first client. Since then, Salmons PC has flourished, with offices in New Mexico, Texas, Arizona, and Mexico.

With the new business endeavor, Salmons wanted to ramp up his networking. One of the first things he did was join PCI. “I knew I needed to get more involved in the industry,” he says. Early on, other PCI members encouraged him to join committees, both to build his network and to find a way to give back. He spent time on the Precast Insulated Wall Panels and Parking Structures Committees, then later became a member of the Blue Ribbon Review Committee for the fifth edition of the *PCI Design Handbook: Precast and Prestressed Concrete*. That’s where he found his calling. “It struck me that some committees spend a lot of time talking, but they don’t get a lot done,” he says. “I saw the handbook committee and thought, ‘That’s a group getting things done. They are writing a book, they have a mission.’” Salmons is the immediate past chair of the PCI Industry Handbook Committee and says that the experience was incredible. “We solved problems and created a tangible end result. It’s very appealing.”

Salmons urges young members to be just as active as he was, even the engineers who tend to be “more introverted.” “If you stand on the sidelines you might learn something, but if you get involved you get every bit back and more than you give,” he says. “Take the initiative and put yourself out there. Otherwise you are missing out on the best part of being a part of PCI.” **D**