

Building the infrastructure of the Southeast

Kat Friedrich



Richard Potts, the recently retired vice president of engineering at Standard Concrete Products Inc., looks back with pride on his career of 44 years in civil engineering, including more than 40 years working with prestressed concrete.

Potts says his family roots are in Knoxville, Tenn., where he attended the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, to study civil engineering.

As a second-generation civil engineer, he got his professional start at Flynt Engineering, where he did highway, bridge, and structure design for four years. He also worked at a prestressed concrete plant as an engineer for about a year, intermittently during that time. He also completed some graduate coursework.

An early turning point in Potts's career happened when he left his hometown and went to Augusta, Ga. He was invited to interview via a cold call. "That was a big ... decision moving away from family and friends."

Potts struck gold when he secured a long-term career at Gary Concrete, a prestressed concrete plant in Augusta. These plants were sold to Zurn Industries and later sold to Hardaway Construction. Hardaway Construction then rebranded the two plants in Georgia and one in Tampa, Fla., as Standard Concrete Products Inc.

"I enjoyed working for Standard Concrete because that was a family-owned business and they treated their employees very well," Potts says.

In the beginning at his new job, Potts encountered an engineering challenge. "I came in with a lot of good ideas on the cutting edge. I redesigned girders on several bridges for a large project." This redesign concept was later scrutinized by the engineer of record and casting was put on hold. "They rescinded their approval of my redesigns, and they rejected all the product we cast."

"That was my worst nightmares," Potts says. "I had some good guys up above me and good legal support from the parent company. We proposed load testing in representative control

groups and developed frames to physically test these products to their limits to prove that the designs were adequate. We came out OK, and they paid for all the testing. That was one of my biggest fears in my career and biggest successes in my career."

A second turning point happened when Zurn Industries was sold to Hardaway Construction and Potts chose to stay there and work at Standard Concrete Products. "That was a big change because I was about ready to go back to Tennessee at that point, and they made me feel very welcome. It all worked out very well."

Potts says he enjoys working with students and universities. He has collaborated with the University of Georgia; the Georgia Institute of Technology in Atlanta; North Carolina State University in Raleigh; Clemson University in Clemson, S.C.; the University of Alabama; and the University of South Carolina.

He says, "A lot of it is just working with students so that they can get excited about the industry. It's been a very rewarding experience working with the students."

Some of his favorite bridge projects he has worked on are segments D, E, and F of Interstate 285 in Atlanta, Ga. He also enjoyed working on the Talmadge Memorial Bridge in Savannah, Ga., and the Arthur Ravenel Jr. Bridge in Charleston, S.C. Another memorable project was the Interstate 85 Piedmont viaduct in Atlanta, both the original construction and emergency replacement after collapse from fire. He also precast superstructure units for piers at the Naval Station in Norfolk, Va., and the Naval Submarine Base at Kings Bay, Ga. He has also precast members for nuclear cooling towers and containment structures at Savannah River Nuclear Solutions.

Potts initially joined PCI through the Georgia/C Carolinas PCI regional chapter with several terms as its Bridges Committee chair and executive committee chair. During this time, he has served on six committees and the board of directors at PCI national.

He was also named a PCI Fellow, is PCI level 3 quality control certified, and is a member of the American Society of Civil Engineers. **■**