

Industry Honors John Dick by Craig A. Shutt

Retiring executive editor of *ASPIRE* achieved many goals during long tenure in precast concrete structures industry



All photos: PCI.

As noted in last issue's Editorial, Executive Editor John S. Dick has retired from his duties with the magazine, as he earlier retired from his position as director of transportation systems at the Precast/Prestressed Concrete Institute (PCI). His long career in the precast concrete structures industry has had a big impact and left him with many colleagues who appreciate his contributions.

"John is the closest thing to a renaissance man that I've seen in my career," says James G. Toscas, president of PCI. "He truly knows how to do a tremendous variety of things and to do them very well. He also has a great work ethic. Who else would continue helping us for more than three years on *ASPIRE*™ after he had retired?"

Indeed, John retired from PCI in 2008 and moved from PCI's home base in Chicago to Monument, Colo., with his wife Nancy. There, he has enjoyed a more relaxed pace and a chance to spend more time with his daughters, Stephanie and Jennifer. Even so, he continued directing *ASPIRE* after conceptualizing the magazine in 2006.

"John has been a stalwart for *ASPIRE* since its inception," says William Nickas, who succeeded John as director of

Transportation Systems and is one of several PCI staffers to take on John's magazine duties. "He is extremely well organized, always on target, and loves concrete to the point that his blood must be gray. His quiet, calm demeanor invokes a fatherly, faithful man and always made me think he was a southern gentleman. Replacing John is a mission impossible, so we are going to take a team approach."

Early Days

ASPIRE is but one of many accomplishments that will continue after his retirement from PCI. They are the product of a career that began in the precast concrete industry in 1970 following his graduation from the University of Wyoming with a B.S. in Civil Engineering.

John spent 14 years in a variety of precasting companies before becoming owner/president/general manager at American Explosives Inc., which provided custom blasting services. In 1986, he joined PCI, and spent the remainder of his career with a singular goal, championing the use of precast concrete products.

He began as director of structural prestressed concrete services and soon added the duties of

director of plant certification. "John was instrumental in making plant certification a qualification for PCI membership," says Tom Battles, president of PCI as of 1987 and a predecessor to Toscas in the position. "It took an awful lot of effort by John, his committees, and staff to make it mandatory. Once it was, it really put the program on the map and gave PCI a significant marketing boost."

He also was responsible for expanding the erection-certification program. "John was the driving force behind that expansion," Battles says. "He did it by building an excellent plant certification committee and riding herd over it. He

Design, Fabrication and Erection of Uni Dome Stadium

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John S. Dick

Standard precast prestressed concrete elements provided a practical framing solution for the wall and ring systems of a 450-ft diameter covered football stadium with an air-supported roof in Cedar Falls, Iowa.

wouldn't disappoint anyone; he made everything happen."

Transportation services played a lesser role in the organization at the time, but John worked to expand PCI's services. "He built the transportation committees from scratch," Battles says. "He became PCI's bridge voice. He knew the subject and really pushed the membership to be more involved and created the technical committees to address specific issues."

Adds Toscas, "John has always been great with our members. When no one is around, people who work at associations like PCI will tell you that dealing with volunteers can be challenging. John never had a problem in this department, and is very highly regarded by the PCI membership."

Battles agrees that John not only worked well with members but also with PCI's staff, all of whom had their own perspectives and needs. "He was very devoted to his programs and fought for what he thought was needed. He was extremely focused on getting things done and worked the association politics to ensure that happened."

Code Vigilance

As he became more involved with transportation issues, the mutual trust and respect with such groups as American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) grew quickly. Members of the AASHTO Subcommittee on Bridges and Structures (SCOBS) saw his devotion to the industry and his knowledge, says Dr. Basile Rabbat, an independent consulting engineer and former manager of structural codes and transportation structures at the Portland Cement Association (PCA).

"John did an amazing job as an ambassador for precast concrete," he says. "He was well respected and very eloquent on behalf of his members. We participated in many seminars together, and he always knew the material and believed in it passionately."

Rabbat met John at AASHTO meetings in the late 1980s and helped him gain his footing, giving PCI its first strong

PCI Titles

After 14 years in the precast concrete manufacturing industry and two years running his own explosives business, John joined PCI in 1986 and took on various responsibilities during this career. His titles comprised:

1986-1987	Director of Structural Prestressed Concrete Services
1988	Director of Structural Prestressed Concrete Services and Director of Plant Certification
1989-1998	Member Services Director
1999-2005	Structures Director
2006-2008	Director of Transportation Services
2007-2012	Executive Editor, <i>ASPIRE</i> Magazine

representation. "He became very interested in committees dealing with code changes, because he understood that you have to mobilize your industry in such decisions or it becomes weaker." John was instrumental in creating the PCI LRFD Subcommittee to work with the AASHTO SCOBS T-10 Committee for Concrete Design. "That was no small job, as it took a lot of coordination and effort to make it happen."

During his time as a state bridge engineer, Nickas also met John through work on the T-10 Committee in 1998. "He always rallied the experts to help the T-10 Committee move through the most complex concrete issues," he says. Rabbat worked with John and others to create the National Concrete Bridge Council (NCBC), which was coordinated by PCA. "The precast industry was well represented by John." That was especially true at annual meetings with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), where issues about concrete construction were discussed and solutions created.

Cliff Freyermuth also met John on the AASHTO committee during his time with the Post-Tensioning Institute, ironically after Freyermuth had left PCI. "I worked continuously with him after that," says Freyermuth, who retired as manager of the American Segmental Bridge Institute (ASBI) in 2008. "He was very helpful to me in those meetings and in helping ASBI get coverage with PCI's publications," after that group's founding in 1988.

John helped Freyermuth organize the PCI-AASHTO-ASBI Segmental Box-Girder Standards that were approved in 1997, he says. "Those gave precast concrete

products the opportunity to more fully participate in the segmental bridge industry," he says.

His efforts at the state level also were appreciated, says M. Myint Lwin, director of the office of bridge technology for the FHWA. The state bridge engineer for the Washington DOT in the 1990s, Lwin met John during visits to the state by PCI staff for training and information sessions.

"I worked with John many times in Washington State, especially as we introduced our new, long-span girders and held seminars to promote precast concrete," says Lwin, who became a charter columnist for *ASPIRE*. "He was a great representative for the precast concrete industry. He gained the trust and confidence of many state DOTs by getting us information we needed and being responsive at all times."

Maher Tadros, emeritus professor of civil engineering at the University of Nebraska, also came to know John in the early 1990s, through his students. One of them received a PCI grant to study optimization of precast concrete bridge I-beams, in response to the government's push to convert to hard SI units.

"The result of that research was the birth of the NU I-girder," Tadros notes. "This girder shape marked the dawn of a new generation of girders throughout the country. John was visionary enough to support a fellowship that was resisted by other experts as rehashing old research. He contributed to creating millions of dollars of additional value for the precast concrete industry by promoting a serious competitor to high-performance structural-steel-plate girders."

Bridge Design Manual

Lwin also worked with John as he spearheaded PCI's *Bridge Design Manual*, which was issued in September 1997. The manual's initial request for proposal (RFP) was created by John in conjunction with Alex Aswad, Ed Wasserman, Reid Castrodale, Chuck Prussack, and several others.

In August of that year, a team comprising Tadros, Deb Derrick, Dick Imper, and Steve Zendegui presented a detailed report of market analysis and technical needs to the newly created Bridge Design Manual Task Group, led by John and consisting of Hank Bonstedt, Reid Castrodale, Roy Eriksson, Scott Olson, Chuck Prussack, and Joe Roche.

Following their recommendation, PCI's board authorized development of the manual, and a production team was assembled to work on the draft. Over the next two years, all initial chapters were balloted and the first edition was issued on September 15, 1997.

"John was gutsy enough to assign me the responsibility of preparing the planning report," says Tadros. "That led to one of the most important documents in PCI history being born in 1997. Even though I was the principal author and he let me have the title, he took the bulk of the responsibility of seeing that the various pieces of this giant project came together."

The second edition was updated in stages between 1999 and 2003, and the third edition was published in 2011. The manual has become a standard reference work for precast concrete bridges. "I received the first edition of the *Bridge Design Manual* as the state bridge engineer in Washington State, and I was very impressed with what had been accomplished," Lwin says.

Another way in which John was impressive, Lwin says, was his clear, articulate, modulated voice. "He could project and be eloquent very easily without a microphone, which can be very helpful at meetings." Indeed, John was well known for his "radio-quality" voice, notes Battles. He often provided introductions at meetings, as well as voice-over narration for PCI's recorded presentations, DVDs, and recordings.

HPC Bridge Views

The *Bridge Design Manual* was one of several publications that John helped build. Another was *HPC Bridge Views*, sponsored by FHWA and NCBC. PCA instigated its creation in 1999 and John ensured precast concrete was well represented, says Rabbat. "He made sure precast concrete bridges were prominent in every issue by providing strong material."

He also was responsible for creating the "Bridges for Life™" program that spun out of FHWA's "Highways for Life" initiative in 2004, Rabbat notes. "John created a way to focus attention on bridges and created brochures and marketing programs to promote the value of precast concrete bridges as part of that program."

Those efforts led John to conceptualize the quarterly *ASPIRE* magazine, which grew out of PCI's successful architect-oriented *Ascent* magazine. Expanding its focus to include all concrete bridges, John gathered executives at PCI, ASBI, PCA, PTI, ACAA, ESCSI, NRMCA, SFA, and WRI, who sponsored the magazine in its formative years and helped create its content, with John's direction.

"John pulled together organizations and sponsors of competing interest and a lack of history of working together and created an outstanding publication," Tadros says. "It's a wonderful magazine."

Adds Freyermuth, "John came to Phoenix to explain the magazine to me, and I thought it was the most significant concrete bridge promotional concept there ever had been. It was a no-brainer for us to participate, and it has proven to be an outstanding addition to the industry."

"John has always been a big-picture thinker," says Toscas. "He knew what the industry needed and worked tirelessly to make it happen. PCI's *Bridge Design Manual* and *ASPIRE* are only two examples of John having a vision of something that had never been done and successfully realizing it."

Tadros agrees. "He has always been a big thinker, but more importantly, he has not only the vision but the determination to turn daunting dreams into realities. These traits were combined with gentleness and the power of persuasion, as well as a very high ethical standard and sheer hard work. I truly admired his ability to get state bridge engineers to feel at home with PCI and have a rich experience. No other organization, to my knowledge, had the success we had with *ASPIRE* in combining all parties involved in bridge design and construction into one coherent and highly collaborative group."

"Our industry, and PCI in particular, is losing a tremendous asset now that John is really retiring," says Toscas. "He will always be a respected friend of the precast concrete structures industry." 

