



Photo: PCI

Expand the Foundational Base in Our Profession

William N. Nickas, *Editor-in-Chief*

The last quarter of 2017 was a particularly busy time, with many great engineering conferences and meetings. I noticed strong attendance and participation at the fall engineering forums (such as the Western Bridge Engineers' Seminar, New York City Bridge Conference, PCI's Committee Days, ASBI Annual Conference, National Concrete Bridge Council meetings, and National Accelerated Bridge Construction Conference). The two overarching themes at these venues were to encourage technical exchanges and rekindle friendships. Both themes are so important. Therefore, in this editorial, I want to build upon an idea that Chuck Prussack, the 2016 PCI chairman of the board, included in his annual message published in the January-February 2016 issue of *PCI Journal*: "Stewardship Key to Future."

Very often, we learn and we share with each other at these events. Two years ago, I saw a materials scientist present data and observations/findings with recommendations about a particular industry problem. His ideas seemed overstated, and some discussion of them took place at the time of the presentation. Twelve months later, in the published paper, this researcher provided conclusions about a bridge system that, from the perspective of a bridge engineer, did not seem logically connected or even based on the study's findings. In my opinion, the author overstepped his area of expertise and the paper's editors and reviewers may have slipped as stewards.

These types of miscues can detract from the value of research findings. In this case, the paper outlined several important issues: key specifications that were violated or missed; inspection opportunities that were skipped by the contractor and his quality control team; and stop-and-hold points totally missed by the construction engineering and inspection inspectors for the owner. In the Winter 2017 issue of *ASPIRE*[®], we published

an editorial titled "Responsibility, Authority, and Accountability" (RAA), which emphasized that improved materials cannot be the only aspect of successful projects. Unfortunately, at the same time that *ASPIRE* was promoting this approach, the paper by the materials science researcher demonstrated that not every study meets the RAA standards.

As I attended recent fall events, it was encouraging to learn about and debate so many great concrete bridge solutions. Then again, I was with good stewards of our industry. Now, those of us who participated in these meetings have an opportunity to continue our stewardship. Here is what I ask of attendees: Take time for an internal lunch-and-learn with your firm. Share with your coworkers what you saw and discussed. And, yes, do your homework—make an extra effort to verify data from papers and presentations, instead of accepting the conclusions of peer-reviewed research over the best practices and manuals of an industry.

Share with your coworkers what you saw and discussed.

Industry-balloted, consensus committee documents and standards represent the conclusions of a diverse mix of industry professionals, not just the few peer reviewers who typically comment on a research article. This diversity ensures that every perspective is considered and best practices are identified in a comprehensive and balanced manner. Going forward, let's also increase the ranks of our profession's stewards. If every firm is represented by at least one person at professional events, we can broaden the foundational base in our profession. ▲

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Cover

The Lesner Bridge in Virginia Beach, Va., consists of twin precast concrete segmental concrete bridges erected by span-by-span and balanced-cantilever methods. Photo: RS&H.

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Publisher

Precast/Prestressed Concrete Institute

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Postmaster: Send address changes to *ASPIRE*, 200 W. Adams St., Suite 2100, Chicago, IL 60606. Standard postage paid at Chicago, IL, and additional mailing offices.

ASPIRE (Vol. 12, No. 1), ISSN 1935-2093 is published quarterly by the Precast/Prestressed Concrete Institute.

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