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# Building on Traditions

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

In my editorial for the Fall 2018 issue of *ASPIRE*®, I briefly discussed a few potential technology changes that may affect concrete bridge construction in the next decade. New structural concrete and reinforcing materials are likely to lead to code changes to accommodate those advancements. My request was that we ensure that any changes are improvements. In this editorial, I am continuing this vital conversation about what constitutes improvement by focusing on what can we learn from the past.

I recently had an opportunity to reflect on the past and the value of traditions when I went to my 35th college class reunion at The Citadel in Charleston, S.C. It was interesting to see classmates and participate in the events at my alma mater for the weekend. My uncle George was also there. As a graduate of the class of 1968, he was celebrating his 50th reunion, and he and his classmates received special recognition as presidential guests. These honorees had a particularly grand time marching and mimicking cadet life of their past. As Uncle George always tells me, strong traditions and past success in every field of practice are keys to future successes.


During the reunion, the Department of Civil Engineering (CE) dedicated a classroom to one of my uncle's classmates, and one of my CE professors, Captain (now Colonel) Thomas Dion, who was retiring. For more than 40 years, Colonel Dion imparted his unique Charlestonian style of teaching in courses on drafting, surveying, hydraulics, and land development. In his classrooms, numerous freshman and sophomore CE students were simultaneously amused by his colloquial statements ("You are spinning your wheels!") and inspired by his calls to develop a passion for one's selected career.

Dion's encouragement of professional passion reflects a value of The Citadel as a whole. In addition to offering formal classroom studies similar to those found at many other learning institutions, The Citadel provides a distinctively rigorous, disciplined

experience shaped by the institution's steadfast traditions and rules. The result is an environment that pushes your limits and builds an aptitude to expand your mind.

One notable Citadel tradition is that the regimental commander of the senior class always writes a letter to the incoming freshmen concerning the upcoming four-year college experiences they will face and grow from. Frederick J. Whittle closed his letter to my class of 1983 with the following exhortation: "Accept its [college's] challenges with a steadfast determination. Follow in the path of those who have come before you, and knowledge, integrity, patriotism, and self-reliance will be yours." This concept of following in the path of others is front and center each May in The Citadel's "Long Gray Line" parade during commencement week. The Long Gray Line refers to the men and women who have graduated from the South Carolina Corps of Cadets; in the parade, the graduating class becomes part of the line and transfers command to the incoming seniors.

As I watched campus life during my reunion, it was obvious to me that the community of new faculty and cadets is fully capable of reinventing the student experience and delivering solutions that will draw strength from the college's traditional foundation and continue to drive leadership. As I reflect on the future of the bridge construction industry, I likewise feel confident that the traditions underlying our engineering principles will be upheld in the future by new leaders.

On page 37 in this issue of *ASPIRE*, you will find an article that I have written, which includes some interesting data on the last 40 years of concrete bridges in the United States. I encourage you to stay in touch with this publication as our team seeks to showcase your concrete bridge engineering accomplishments. I hope your endeavors will create an even greater "gray line" impact in the decades to come. 

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**Cover**

The Interstate 91 Brattleboro Bridge in Brattleboro, Vt., received a 2018 CRSI HONORS Design and Construction Award. Photo: © Adam Cohen 2017, Figg Engineering Group.

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