



## Structural Engineering

*Understanding a Life Long Passion*

*By Craig E. Barnes, P.E., SECB*

Let me provide a little bit of background so you'll understand what the last paragraph of this InFocus article is all about. Those of us who have or have had young children wondered, at some point in their development, what they were going to be doing in life. Some of you can probably still remember doubts that you had as to what you were going to do in life. I just know, without benefit of survey, most engineers reading this have achieved something pretty wonderful and satisfying in life. You may be towards the end of that career road or looking toward retirement and the enjoyment that provides, or, on the other end of the spectrum, you may be sitting in a student activities room in a university, thumbing through this magazine to see what structural engineers are doing. Whatever the case, you have involved yourself in something that offers great satisfaction and excitement, Structural Engineering. Are there other ways to achieve the same satisfaction? Perhaps. We may all know people who don't have to work nearly as hard as we do, or have anywhere near the level of responsibility that we have, or have what we might even consider some of life's goodies, but you know deep down that they don't have the same kind of satisfaction and enjoyment that you do.

I am one of those very blessed and fortunate individuals who were destined before birth to become a structural engineer (at least that's what my wife says). I wasn't the brightest bulb in the high school package. I had to do a little bit of silver-tongued conniving to talk my way into college because of that poor high school background. I married while in school, which, according to my parents at the time, was surely the end of my school career. However, as is often the case, marriage was a life-changing experience. It became evident early on why my high school track record had been less than stellar. Within one term, I managed to go Dean's List and continued on that course through a Master's program.

Having children at an early age, or at any age for that matter, alters life in many ways. One quickly realizes that a family goes into training for life's experiences by becoming a Bluebird Advisor, a Cub Scout leader, a Little League Coach and a Sunday School teacher. That brings on even more change as new adult interactions develop larger commitments to the local community, church and profession.

If you really like the structural engineering profession, and I mean **really like** the profession, you probably have found yourself reading more and more technical offerings, unconsciously analyzing the process of structural engineering. Before you know it, you find your-

self in the larger process by becoming involved in the American Concrete Institute, the American Society of Civil Engineers/Structural Engineers Institute, the Coalition of American Structural Engineers, the National Council of Structural Engineers associations, and state organizations. In the next step you find yourself in leadership roles, both guiding and setting policy for those organizations.

A real eye-opener occurs when you have just taken on the presidency of the Structural Engineers Association of Massachusetts, your business partner has taken on the presidency of the Boston Association of Structural Engineers, and in the same timeframe your son has just completed a term as president of the International Concrete Restoration Institute, New England Chapter.

While casting around for topics for this article, I reviewed recent announcements on our company website and saw *Wayne R. Lawson, President BASE, Craig E. Barnes, President SEAMASS, and Jeffrey S. Barnes, President ICRI*, and thought there might be a story there. Not knowing what to do with what might not be more than interesting trivia, I spoke to Christine Sloat, P.E., owner of Copper Creek Companies, Inc. (publisher of this magazine), who provided me with a bit of insight, summarized in this last paragraph, which I simply call "growth, maturity, and development." Christine suggested one's career is enhanced by understanding the importance of learning from experience – the realities of leadership, preparing for leadership roles in your workplace, the network of people that you meet, marketing (yourself, your employer, your profession), involvement in your profession (particularly in organizations whose mission and vision is to make a difference in that profession), learning new things, acting as or finding a mentor, discovering that you have talents, ideas and information that others are interested in learning about or from, and so on.

The bottom line is that a "career" is not just going to work every day and doing your job – it is expanding your horizons and being involved in your industry inside and outside of work; both you and your "job/employer" benefit from the experience. ■

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