

Advancing the Concrete Industry by Degrees

by Eugene Martineau

In the early 1990s the U.S. ready mixed concrete industry was in the midst of a very deep downward economic cycle. In response to this disappointing industry wide economic performance a grass roots movement began that captured the attention and imagination of the entire industry. The basic premise of Ready Mixed Concrete 2000 (RMC2000) was that the industry should be significantly more successful, considering it was the supplier of the most versatile, cost effective and durable building material utilized in virtually every aspect of construction. As the RMC2000 movement gained industry-wide acceptance, a strategic plan was developed to serve as a guide for broad based implementation. The implementation cycle included the endorsement of most of the state and national industry associations. Many of which, including the National Ready Mixed Concrete Association (NRMCA), formed RMC2000 implementation committees for the purpose of developing and putting into action the many proposed initiatives outlined in the plan. A final implementation phase included 22 nationwide workshops on how to integrate and implement RMC2000 not only in associations but in companies as well. The ideas and suggested actions outlined by RMC2000 became a catalyst for positive transformational industry-wide change.

Over the past 15 years and continuing today, many of the positive initiatives that are moving our industry forward are directly linked to the RMC2000 movement. It would be extremely difficult to rank the many off-shoots of the movement that have and continue to positively benefit the industry. Certainly, the transformation of NRMCA into the vibrant proactive association it is today by incorporating the RMC2000 vision and much of the strategic plan in its own long-term strategy would be at or near the top.

Challenging the transformation of NRMCA as to long-term importance for the future of the industry, in my opinion, would be the rapidly growing and future impact of the Concrete Industry Management Program (CIM).

CIM can also trace its roots to the RMC2000 movement. One of the industry associations that fully embraced the movement's vision and goals was the Tennessee Ready Mixed Association (now Tennessee Concrete Association). Like many associations it formed an RMC2000 implementation committee. One of the movement's main goals for advancing the industry was to increase the talent level and professionalism of the industry through education. During a RMC2000 committee meeting of the TCA, as it often times happened during the evolution of the movement, the original goals and suggested actions of RMC2000 were improved upon. The TCA committee's vision for improving and advancing the industry through education was to create a university level program in Concrete Industry Management. They believed that this could ultimately result in populating the industry's management and ultimately its leadership with graduates from the program and thereby significantly increase the level of talent and professionalism in the industry. Since such an undertaking had never been attempted before, this idea, like much of the movement's vision, initially seemed out of reach. However, as those of us who were RMC2000 disciples learned, never underestimate the power of a vision.

The TCA committee believed in its vision and began a process of building support. Before it could unveil its idea to the industry it first had to determine if the idea could be feasible to a university. In order to test the plan, it approached the dean of the College of Basic and Applied Sciences at Middle Tennessee State University (MTSU), Dr. Earl Keese. He was initially skeptical that there would



be sufficient industry support to sustain such a major undertaking of developing a totally new program. Furthermore, how would the necessary approval levels of academics react to such a concept? Keese was specific that such an undertaking would need a great deal more than financial backing. He told the committee members that if they thought simply raising money would be enough they should abandon their idea. Dr. Keese insisted that if the university was to go forward with the idea, the industry must help develop the curriculum, remain an engaged partner long-term, and widely and enthusiastically market the program. The committee members assured the dean that the industry was indeed ready to support such a program with time, talent and treasure.

TCA was now fully invested in the committee's idea, so it took the idea to the national RMC2000 leadership. The RMC2000 leadership enthusiastically endorsed the idea and agreed to present it at an upcoming RMC2000 national meeting. Dr. Keese attended the meeting and when the idea was presented to the 200 or so grassroots followers in attendance, he was overwhelmed by the on-the-spot endorsement of the idea. Further demonstrating the industry's show of support \$50,000 was pledged within minutes. Since he had been first approached, Dr. Keese was learning about the size and relative importance of the industry to the overall U.S. economy and the number of people the industry employed. These facts and the enthusiastic support of the industry both in Tennessee and nationally had him convinced that such an undertaking might just be possible.

Once Dr. Keese bought into the possibility that this might be doable, the real work began. Today, as we look back over the evolution CIM, it is difficult to fully comprehend all of the work that was required to establish the program. So much of the credit goes to the group of industry participants in Tennessee who had the original vision and would not be dissuaded. Remember that this was 1995 and their vision was to produce a graduate with a degree in CIM by the year 2000 to coincide with the culmination of RMC2000. In order to reach the goal the group quickly came to the conclusion that it needed to acquire critical mass. To accomplish this, it formed a local patrons group for the specific purpose of establishing CIM at MTSU and worked closely with the dean to convince all the necessary entities both within the university as well as the state governing agencies that this was not just a pipe dream. We need to remember that in the beginning there were no other



university-level programs to model their program after. In fact, experienced faculty, lesson plans, textbooks and even a curriculum were nonexistent. The local patrons, working closely with Dr. Keese, tackled each of these issues and when they needed additional national support they enlisted the aid of the RMC2000 national leadership network.

One of the pivotal hurdles that needed to be overcome was development of the curriculum. A curriculum committee was formed with representatives from the various national associations who had academic backgrounds and certain other industry leaders who could provide insight into the course requirements that the industry would expect graduates to have experienced. It soon became clear to this ad hoc curriculum committee that it would be making a mistake to limit the scope of the course requirements to the ready mixed concrete portion of the concrete industry. Drawing from the name Concrete Industry Management, the committee attempted to design a curriculum that would equip a graduate with a well rounded background to enter any aspect of the concrete manufacturing industry or its supply chain. The reasoning that predated this change was the fact that the broader based concrete industry would offer graduates even a greater opportunity for employment. Furthermore, with the industry consolidating, many companies would be engaged with business entities that would encompass a wide range of concrete producing operations. Another key decision that the committee made was that the curriculum would be directed toward the goal of producing future managers for the industry and not attempt to be a surrogate engineering program. These concepts were readily endorsed by the dean, local patrons and the national industry at large.

Realizing the importance of keeping the broader national industry invested in the program, Dr. Keese and the local patrons recruited national support to form an oversight committee. That committee became known as the National Steering Committee (NSC). Initially, the NSC was loosely organized, but it did represent a good cross section of the industry from both producers and associations. The NSC met once a year at MTSU, to review progress and offer suggestions and assistance that was primarily financial in nature in order to advance the program. While the NSC membership did participate in other activities designed to assist in the development of the program, the real energy was supplied by the patrons. In conjunction with Dr. Keese, they deserve the real credit in turning vision into reality.

Much of the success of CIM at MTSU has been well documented. The original goal of producing graduates by the year 2000 was indeed met. The first graduating class had three graduates and the program has continuously grown to a level that it projects 80 graduates this year. Time passed and as it became evident that the program was indeed a success several issues began to surface. First, the broad-based concrete industry was now very excited about a growing supply of graduates for entry level management training positions in all the various product lines. Second, although MTSU was doing a magnificent job growing the program, it was clear that it would not solely be able to adequately supply the industry's demand for graduates that was estimated at 500 graduates a year. In addition to these two significant issues, upon witnessing the success of CIM and with its membership successfully employing some of the graduates, representatives of the American Society of Concrete Contractors (ASCC) in conjunction with the patrons and university officials were exploring the possibilities of developing a parallel tract of CIM that would produce graduates that would be equipped to enter the contracting side of the industry. While this certainly was an exciting prospect and would pay long-term dividends for the combined concrete industry, it would further limit the supply of graduates available for the manufacturing and suppliers side of the industry. The final issue confronting MTSU, the patrons and the NSC was the fact that many of the graduates would prefer to remain in the Southeast region upon graduation, which further limited MTSU as the sole resource in supplying the needs of the entire U.S. industry.

In order to address these issues, the MTSU administration working in conjunction with

the patrons and the NSC began to explore the possibility of securing governmental support for expanding the program. At its annual meeting in 2004, the NSC in discussions with the leadership of the patrons, the CIM program director and university administration assessed what it would take to successfully expand the program. Dr. Thomas Cheatham who had become the university's liaison with the industry when Dr. Keese accepted the presidency of a college in Ohio; outlined the potential for a \$600,000 grant MTSU was attempting to secure from the National Science Foundation (NSF). Dr. Cheatham would provide an experienced hand to the CIM program director and faculty guiding them through all the red tape of the grant process. It was clear that the odds were against winning the grant, as very few grants were secured on the first pass. With or without the grant, it was evident to all that the issue of expansion could not be put off. In order to be equipped to help lead the expansion process, the NSC added structure to its committee by electing a slate of officers and agreeing to meet on a more frequent basis to address the details of expanding CIM. With the NSC now fully engaged and the combined energy of university's administration and the local patrons, the vision of expansion begins


to show promise. It was agreed by all that the model for expansion of the program was MTSU which the NSC leadership had designated as CIM's flagship university. As had been the case from the outset, MTSU and the local patrons had embraced the RMC2000 vision of "Building Solid Partnerships into Tomorrow" and did not allow proprietary concerns to hold back progress for the greater good of the program and ultimately the industry. The leadership of MTSU has always been very vocal in its support of the CIM program. President Dr. Sidney McPhee has designated CIM as one of the university's signature programs. Dr. McPhee's enthusiastic support of the program is made evident by his personal presence at NSC meetings both on the MTSU campus as well as at national venues such as the World of Concrete and CONEXPO-CON/AGG. This collaborative effort of academia and industry captured the imagination of the NSC and, in what amounted to an almost unprecedented endorsement, granted MTSU the \$600,000 to assist in expanding the program. One provision was that the industry would at a minimum match the financial commitment

Fortunately, the NSC and MTSU's program director had not been waiting for the NSF

to respond to the grant proposal to begin their expansion process. Using the successful MTSU model as a guide, a game plan was developed that stressed a three-pronged approach for the launching of a successful new program. First and foremost, regional level industry support and commitment was required. This would have to be a regionally diverse industry commitment of time talent and treasure. The NSC leadership had determined \$1 million and a five-year commitment would be required in order to successfully establish a new program. In order to ensure that this would be a partnership between the local patrons and the NSC, similar to what exists at MTSU, the plan called for a 50/50 sharing of the commitment. NSC would provide \$100,000 dollars a year for five years and the local patrons would commit to furnish a like amount. Thus, the expansion school would be guaranteed if they met the requirements of a million dollars over five years to assist in establishing a program.

In addition, funds from the NSF grant would be used for additional start-up expenses, including exposing new staff to the successful MTSU program. MTSU staff would also spend time at the new schools explaining curriculum and sharing lesson plans and best practices. The second

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criteria included a commitment of the new CIM universities to agree to follow the MTSU model and core curriculum. Part of this requirement was a goal to produce graduates with a four-year degree in CIM. Ultimately, the CIM program would achieve not only major status but also, upon reaching critical mass, department status.

The final requirement was a commitment from the national concrete industry. At a watershed NSC meeting it was decided that the funding requirements to support the expansion efforts would best be achieved through pledges by the concrete industry's national associations and foundations. Therefore, no solicitation of funds would be directed at individual companies. This would allow for individual companies to participate in the local patrons groups and financially support the schools in the regions where they were doing business. During this organizational process, the expansion which had originally been planned for two additional schools had already grown to three and a fourth was a possibility.

Over the next three years, the MTSU CIM program directors in conjunction with the NSC leadership were busy screening possible expansion opportunities to ensure that all of the criteria outlined in the MTSU model were in place.

Austin Chaney, the original program director at MTSU who had contributed so much to not only the MTSU CIM development but the expansion effort as well, left to accept a dean's position at a college in New York State in the middle of the expansion phase. Dr. McPhee quickly promoted Dr. Heather Brown to the position of CIM program director. Dr. Brown had served as the lead professor of the CIM program and had done an outstanding job in that role as well as assisting in the expansion effort. Dr. Brown stepped right in and with the support of Dr. McPhee and Dean Cheatam, and financed by the NSF grant, worked in conjunction with the steering committee leadership on the expansion effort by supplying the insight and tools to the new schools to assist in the establishment of their new programs.

The first expansion school and patrons group to meet all the requirements set forth by the steering committee was Arizona State University (ASU). The next school and patrons group was at California State University at Chico (Chico) and finally the New Jersey Institute of Technology (NJIT) and their patrons group were approved. By the 2006-07 school year, all three programs were up and running offering CIM course work. So the original two school

expansion covered by the NSF grant had not only been met but surpassed.

Now there were CIM programs established in the S.E., S.W. N.W. and N.E. Each of the supporting patrons groups that had agreed to the formula set forth by the national steering committee had successfully exceeded the necessary pledges to fund their portions of the five-year commitments to the universities. The matching national funding that was to be funneled through the NSC had historically come from the RMC Research & Education Foundation (RMCREF) and the Portland Cement Association (PCA) in support of the MTSU program and now had to be expanded in order to be fully funded. During the expansion time frame of approximately three years, additional national associations and foundations were recruited to add their time talent and treasure to the NSC.

Today, in my opinion, the NSC comprises the most significant concrete industry coalition that has ever existed. The NSC Board of Directors includes the leadership of long-standing CIM financial supporters RMCREF and PCA. It has been joined by the NRMCA, ASCC, The American Concrete Pipe Association (ACPA), National Concrete Masonry Association (NCMA), the National Precast Concrete

Every step of the way.



Association (NPCA) and the Precast/Prestressed Concrete Institute (PCI). There are a number of board seats that are occupied by the leadership of national companies that have multi concrete production capabilities and in some instances serve the industry as suppliers of raw materials or equipment. Many of these companies have been supporters of CIM from the outset. Most have served on the NSC since its inception and have provided leadership, financial support and scholarships for the patrons groups beginning with MTSU patrons and all of the subsequent groups that were formed in the expansion.

During the expansion phase, the NSC functioned without any paid staff. The committee's administrative requirements were handled by the various administrative staffs of the committee's leadership working in conjunction with the CIM administrative assistant at MTSU. A great deal of the work load was picked up by NRMCA and specifically by NRMCA senior vice president Nicole Maher who has and remains an ardent supporter of CIM. Therefore, a significant amount of work was accomplished through an all-volunteer organization similar to the RMC2000 movement. However, as the expansion flourished and the structure and scope of the NSC grew, it became apparent that

additional executive leadership was needed to address the many issues that had been created.

In addition, eventually adding to the growing administrative burden for the NSC in 2005 the MTSU patrons were in the early stages of a building fund-raising effort for a new campus home for the CIM program. One of their ideas was to hold an auction of donated goods and services to raise money for the building fund. Hanley Wood had agreed to hold the auction at the 2006 World of Concrete (WOC) in Las Vegas. The major headline item was a truck donated by International and a mixer donated by McNeilus. Additional companies that displayed at the WOC also donated products and entertainment packages to be auctioned. While the patrons did much of the work, the NSC did assist in this successful event. Later in 2006 Hanley Wood through Rick Yelton, editor of *Concrete Producer magazine*, volunteered that the 2007 WOC would be available as a venue for another auction, if NSC would be the sponsor. Once again, along with this great opportunity came a significant amount of additional administrative responsibility for NSC.

With NSC designated as the banker for all of the national associations' and foundations' pledged funds, in order to be the sponsor of the

auction it had to establish itself as a designated 501c3 not for profit organization for tax reporting purposes. NSC would be potentially collecting and distributing in excess of a million dollars annually. Therefore it was now even a greater priority to find a way to provide more consistent executive administrative support for the committee. As has often been the case with CIM, divine intervention took place. Dr. Earl Keese, the original dean at MTSU who had become the champion of the CIM program and had in conjunction with the patron's leadership firmly established it at MTSU, retired as president of Rhodes State University. Dr. Keese had maintained a connection with CIM both through the patrons and the NSC, so when his retirement was announced the NSC leadership contacted him and inquired if he would be willing to serve as executive director. Dr. Keese accepted the position with the understanding that it would be a part-time position. In Dr. Keese, the NSC had the perfect individual that knew the history of CIM and had a passion for the program. In fact, while he was still at MTSU, the students had dubbed him Dr. Concrete. He also understood what was required to navigate between academia and the industry and was able to work effectively with both to advance the program



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and handle the growing administrative requirements as well.

The 2007 auction was a great success thanks to the many volunteers who served on the NSC marketing committee and the guidance and support of the MTSU patrons. In total over \$450,000 was raised to support CIM. The timing for the additional cash infusion was perfect as discussions were now underway to add a CIM program at a fifth university. Ingram Ready Mix located in Brownsville, TX was in the process of finalizing a major donation to Texas State University in San Marcos for its School of Engineering. Earl Ingram, v.p. of Ingram Ready Mix,

had heard about CIM and had convinced his father, Bruce Ingram, to carve out a portion of the family's pledge to Texas State for the purpose of providing seed money for a CIM program there. Earl's educational background is unique for someone in our industry in that he possesses a doctorate degree in civil engineering and has been a faculty member of a major university. He therefore has a great appreciation for the value of education and how CIM can help advance the industry. After numerous discussions with Earl and the Board of Directors of The Texas Aggregates and Concrete Association (TACA), the executive leadership of NSC was convinced that

there was sufficient industry support for a new program. During the same time frame, NSC executive leadership held several meetings with the President and Provost of Texas State and explained the level of commitment necessary from the university and the process that NSC had developed for establishing a program. These meetings proved to be very positive and the NSC leadership was impressed with everyone at Texas State, from the president on down, and their excitement and enthusiasm for the potential of having a CIM program at their university. Armed with the positive support of the industry and the university, the NSC leadership presented the concept to the NSC Board of Directors and Texas State, and it was unanimously approved as a new CIM designated university.

Over the first half of 2007, Dr. Keese continuously reminded the executive committee that he has accepted the executive director's position with the understanding that it would be a part-time position and that he would serve on an interim basis until the long-term need for a director was clear. With the rapid expansion of the program, the growth of the NSC and its various committees combined with the additional burden of the auction, which now had been extended to 2008 and beyond, Dr. Keese did not feel he could commit the necessary time to do the program justice and the NSC leadership needed to come up with a solution. Dr. Keese agreed to stay on until a solution could be worked out and he pledged to remain involved with the program and assist it in any reasonable manner even after his successor was located. When it became clear to the leadership of NSC that Doctor Keese could not be coaxed into extending his service much longer, they approached David Vickers a long-time NSC member and an ardent supporter of CIM, as to the possibility of serving on an interim basis until it became clear as to the long-term requirements of the executive director position. Dave possesses a unique background as a long-time industry executive; he was one of the grassroots leaders of RMC2000, a past chairman of both the NRMCA and RMCREF and served on the Executive Committee of PCA. Dave, like Dr. Keese, had retired as a regional president of Lehigh Cement a few years ago; but had remained active in the industry and with NSC. He agreed to accept the part-time executive director's position on an interim basis beginning in October 2007.

Once again, divine intervention had played a role in the advancement of the CIM program. Dave Vickers was the ideal individual to replace Earl Keese. Dr. Keese, true to his word, has



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remained involved and provided Dave great counsel and insight to much of the administrative issues of managing a 501c3 organization and the necessary interface with five universities. Dave, in his own right, has provided strong executive leadership and experience as an individual who was responsible as a chairman in the significant advancement of two separate 501c3 organizations. He has been able to effectively interface with the various university program directors, patrons groups and the executive leadership and Board of Directors of NSC. Dave's involvement was vital in his interface on the administrative details for the successful 2008 auction. Many months of dedication and hard work on the part of the NSC auction committee resulted in reaching a new milestone by raising in excess of \$550,000 dollars. Once again, as has been the case since the auction's inception, the lead auction items – a truck and mixer – were provided by International Truck and McNeillus. The auction's success was again the result of the strong coalition of Hanley Wood, WOC staff, Ritchie Brothers Auctioneers, the NSC Auction Committee which included support from CIM students, and the many companies and associations that donated items for the auction.

While a great deal has been accomplished, the NSC still has an aggressive agenda for the advancement of the program. The first priority is to complete a long-range planning process that was begun in late 2007. At the present time, a framework for the plan has been presented and endorsed by the Board of Directors. Over the remainder of the year, under the direction of the executive committee, a process of "putting meat on the bones" will evolve. The draft's long-range plan will be fully vetted by the various committees of NSC with input from the patrons groups and the network of CIM university program directors. Emerging from this process will be answers to questions such as industry-wide requirements for graduates, future expansions of the program, the timing for establishment of an Executive Masters Program, the long-term requirements for executive staff for NSC, ongoing curriculum review and development and the insurance of the quality of the CIM brand, to name a few. Part of the planning process is the succession plan being developed by the Executive Committee for officers and directors.

Since the inception of CIM in 1995, what are the real tangible returns to the industry for its investment in the program? Currently, there are nearly 400 graduates from MTSU working in the industry. There are presently over 500



students enrolled in CIM at the four universities that have active programs. Texas State (our newest CIM school) is presently hiring a program director and professors and intends to begin its program in early 2009.

The CIM program has gained recognition from the Secretary of Education as a shining example of industry, academia and education working together. The National Science Foundation has recognized the CIM expansion grant as one of its success stories. The goal of CIM is to produce future leaders for the industry. Proof that this is happening is in the career paths that some of the early graduates have taken. Not only are they advancing within their careers, they are committed to assisting in the continued advancement of CIM. The past three and the current president of the MTSU Patrons are CIM graduates. Every graduate that has wished to pursue a career in the industry has been hired by a company representing some aspect of the industry. A testament to the passion for the industry that is ingrained in CIM students is the fact that most of them are remaining in the industry and not, as in the case with many college graduates, moving to a different field than what their major and degree was in.

As I was writing this article two things became clear. First, if I were to recognize all of the individuals that have contributed to the success of CIM I would invariably leave someone out. Second, because there have been so many that have given of their time, talent and treasure, there would not be enough room in the magazine to list them and their contributions. Therefore, I have chosen not to recognize any of the industry participants. Knowing the details of this phenomenal success, I feel sure that this is one time when all who have been involved, whether it was at a local patron's level or at the NSC, would agree that this has been a true partnership and a labor of love, and that the program's success is recognition enough. The ready mixed concrete

industry can be especially proud that its leadership did not attempt to keep what it started under RMC2000 as a proprietary program. The RMC Research & Education Foundation and NRMCA have and continue to be the program's strongest supporters, and they fully endorse the concept of CIM being a program for the entire concrete industry.

Currently, our industry is immersed in a difficult economic cycle, not dissimilar to that of the early 1990's that preceded the beginning of RMC2000. There is a changing of the guard underway as many long-time industry leaders are at or nearing retirement. So, new leadership is needed in many endeavors, including CIM. Consolidation and vertical integration are, now more than ever, the norm. A new set of executives are leading a shrinking number of very large and diverse organizations that are being pressured to show returns that were envisioned when the decision to consolidate was made. Hopefully, in spite of these challenging economic times, our industry leaders are operating at a higher level of understanding of the importance in investing in association and industry advancement initiatives. Therefore, they will continue to support important programs like CIM and, consequently, CIM will continue "Advancing the Concrete Industry by Degrees." ■

Eugene Martineau currently serves as chairman of the National Steering Committee of the Concrete Industry Management program. He was a founder of US Concrete and served as its president, chief executive officer and director since its inception in 1998 through May 2007. Martineau has over 39 years of experience in the ready mixed concrete and related industries and at the executive level has overseen ready mixed operations in 15 states. He is a longtime supporter of NRMCA, having served the Association in many roles, including five terms as a member of the Board of Directors and four times on the Executive Committee. He was named an Honorary Director of the Association in 2007. Martineau has also been a member of the Board of Trustees of the RMC Research & Education Foundation since its inception in 2001 and was chairman of the Foundation's Program Committee from 2001-2003. In 2004 he was elected chairman of the Foundation. He was a founder of RMC2000, a grassroots industry movement that was a positive catalyst for transformational change for both the industry and NRMCA and served as its national director from 1994-1997.