

From the Heart of the Steeler Nation

BY BILL PASCOLI

From a very young age, it seemed that fate was driving AISC's New England regional engineer toward a career in steel.

I DEVELOPED AN INTEREST in bridges at a very young age. Perhaps it was destiny, as I grew up near America's steel capital, Pittsburgh—in a town called Bridgeville. And its name describes it perfectly; you can't leave Bridgeville without crossing a bridge over Chartiers Creek or a tributary. Also, my father was a self-employed carpenter/cabinet-maker who learned his trade in Italy at a young age and immigrated to the U.S. in 1929. When I was 14 he began teaching me how to work with tools and build things.

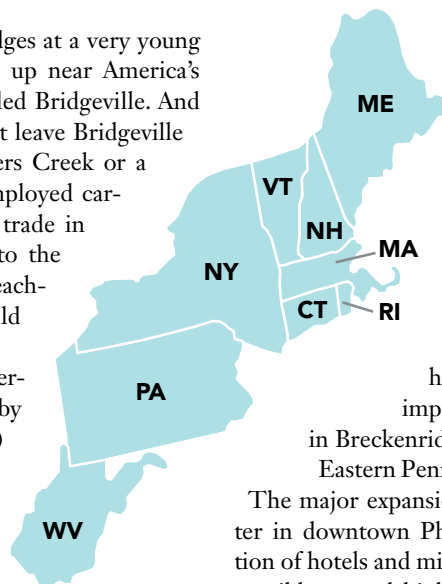
In my junior year as a civil engineering student at Penn State, I passed by the American Bridge Division (ABD) of the U. S. Steel fabrication plant in Ambridge, Pa. On the roof of one of the buildings was a sign that claimed that the Ambridge plant was the largest steel fabricating plant in the world.

I eventually went to work for ABD and learned just about everything that I know about structural steel during my 20-year career there. Probably the most important lessons that I learned were that 1) *people* build the buildings or bridges and 2) the fabrication and erection processes involve the same amount of structural engineering as the actual design of the structure.

My career at AISC started in 1996 as the regional engineer in the Upper Midwest region. In 2002 I became AISC's national project director for the parking garage and marketing-to-decision-makers initiatives, then returned to the field in 2005 I returned to the field, this time as the regional engineer for the New England region. My territory includes Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia, as well as upstate New York from Buffalo to Albany and approximately Poughkeepsie to Plattsburgh and Gouverneur. This is a lot of geography to cover, but there are a number of major metropolitan areas that provide a gauge for what is going in the region.

What's Happening Back East

In Pittsburgh our young mayor, Luke Ravenstahl, claims that the city is currently going through its third renaissance with the new Rivers Casino along the Ohio River, which is scheduled to open in the fall of 2009, and the new Penguin's Hockey Arena that is under construction and opening in time



for the 2010 season. These two steel-framed projects and the LEED-Certified David L. Lawrence Convention Center have stimulated the construction of several steel hotels, condos, and mixed-use buildings in the downtown area. There is even some activity in the industrial sector, with U. S. Steel planning a \$1 billion modernization of their coke making facility in Clairton, Pa. Allegheny Technologies has also made plans for a \$1.4 billion improvement to their steel making facilities in Breckenridge, Pa.

Eastern Pennsylvania is showing signs of growth too.

The major expansion of the steel-framed convention center in downtown Philadelphia is stimulating the construction of hotels and mixed-use buildings in the short term and possibly several high-rise buildings in the long term. Two casino projects in the area that were licensed the same time as Rivers Casino in Pittsburgh have not even broken ground due to local and city objections to their locations along the Delaware River. However, the state of Pennsylvania has recently drafted legislation to encourage the city to reach an agreement with the casino licensees to allow them to build or find new sites for their facilities. Time will tell. Another (steel) casino project, the Sands Bethworks Casino in Bethlehem, Pa, which is scheduled to open in the fall, is located on the site of the former Bethlehem Steel facility.

Boston is undergoing a renaissance of its own with the emergence of the Rose Kennedy Greenway, which is the space reclaimed after the elevated central artery structure was removed as a result of the "Big Dig" project. The city is now reconnected and development is taking place in the Financial and Seaport Districts, with a new convention center along with hotel, office, and residential buildings. More development is planned including several steel high-rise office and mixed-use buildings in tandem with the health-care and life science construction in Cambridge and Boston, which con-



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tinues to be an important part of the city's progress.

Waterfront development has been the key to the economic development of upstate New York, but the loss of revenue has crippled the state's plans for most projects including the new convention center in Albany and the renewal of downtown Buffalo. It is encouraging, however, that developers continue to invest in property for future consideration in the corridor from Buffalo to Albany.

West Virginia, while small, it is not insignificant, since the coal industry is still such an important factor in its economy. I hope to support the fabricators in this state and help grow the market for steel in other sectors including parking, office, institutional, and residential.

The Fabrication Picture

During the fourth quarter of 2008 and the first quarter of 2009, I visited more than half of the AISC member fabricators in my region and plan to visit the remainder during the second quarter of 2009. In general most fabricators are optimistic and have a strategy to survive the current recession. Many of them will be making those long-planned improvements in the shop or completing the process to become an AISC certified shop in the bridge, bridge component, or building categories.

There are four regional fabricator groups spread out throughout my region. The Steel Fabricators of New England (SFNE) has reinvented itself and is currently very active with internal membership meetings on current topics and an education committee tasked to provide programs for their members and outreach to the AEC community. Recent meeting topics have included the application of the theory of constraints to running a successful business and the group's 28th annual engineers' conference at the Worcester Polytechnic Institute. (Visit www.ssfne.org.)

The New York State Steel Fabricator's Association is also very active in upstate New York and usually has two membership meetings a year that feature a current topic along with an open exchange of information on the state of the business in the area. (Visit www.nyssf.org.)

Currently the regional fabricator groups in the state of West Virginia and the Mid-Atlantic Fabricators Association, which covers central and eastern Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Delaware, are relatively inactive but hopefully will be revitalized with the new Regional Fabricators Group Summit that Carly Moore, AISC's membership director, is fostering.

On Parking

I classify myself as the "quixotic" champion for steel-framed parking structures at AISC, since I have been involved in the initiative for nearly eight years. To promote the use of steel as a viable material for parking garages, I represented AISC at the International Parking Institute's conference, which took place last month in Denver, and will also be at the National Parking Association's conference in the Washington, D.C. area, October 11-15. On a regional basis I will also be participating in parking association programs in Pennsylvania, New York, and New England.

Besides being home to the Steeler Nation (which is still ecstatic after the team, only months ago, won its sixth Super Bowl trophy!), Pittsburgh is also where you will find the best example of steel-framed parking garages that have withstood the test of time. The garages at Station Square, Duquesne University, Carnegie Mellon University, and Allegheny General Hospital, to name a few, are all still serviceable. If you are ever in the area, I would be happy to take you on a tour. MSC