

# Concrete Can't Place Itself!



**Phil Kresge**  
Senior Vice President,  
Local Paving

**T**echnology today claims to be making life easier. Voice assistant software agents conduct internet searches for us and can even turn on lights, play music and adjust room thermostats on command. Cars tell us when we've veered out of lane, when we are approaching an object and when to brake. Some cars can even parallel park themselves. Perhaps the ultimate is the driverless vehicle.

I started in the concrete industry in the '80s at a small, family-owned ready mix company in central New York State. At that time, the company was one of the first in the area to have automated batching. Looking back at the system we had then, it is almost antiquated compared to the systems in use today. GPS and laser-guided equipment help contractors place concrete more efficiently, and within tighter tolerances, than ever before.

But no matter how advanced technology may be, one thing is still true – concrete can't place itself. And unlike our competitors, concrete pavement is not a one-stop shop material. The alliance of ready mix producer and concrete contractor is key to expanding our market. But ironically, that alliance is a rarity in our industry.

I think back to my days as promotion director for the Pennsylvania Concrete Promotion Council (PCPC). From the start, we included a contractor membership level and, at one time, actually had more contractor members than producer members. We knew the importance of including contractors in our promotion efforts. When pitching the concept of a concrete pavement, having the contractor

on board to answer specific questions about procedure and cost was invaluable.

While at this year's ConcreteWorks, I had the opportunity to participate in the NRMCA State Affiliate/Promotion team meeting. Representatives from numerous state associations were joined by staff from NRMCA's Build With Strength and Pave Ahead teams to discuss topics of importance to the industry. With my NRMCA colleagues Jon Hansen and Donn Thompson, I facilitated the group discussing contractor partnerships. Throughout the discussions, there were some recurring themes. First, we need "boots on the ground" to implement a successful target market campaign. Second, an alliance with a contractor is essential. And third, the only way to get the industrial pavement market is to put the ready mixed concrete producer and contractor together.

The consensus was that we can't do anything without the contractor. The contractor has the relationships with the owners and developers. The producer needs a good relationship with the contractor to be able to maximize the opportunity.

There were also what I thought were some disturbing comments. "As producers, the contractor is our customer but not always our ally." "We need to change our mindset and move our relationship from adversarial to alliance." And my favorite, "We cooperate, but we don't cooperate."

Open lines of communication are important to maintaining a good relationship. Too often, the contractor does not know what the producer has to offer, particularly with mix design opportunities. Likewise, it is just as often that the producer does not know the true capabilities of the contractor, such as how many square feet of pavement it can place in a day.

At NRMCA, we understand the importance of the contractor/producer partnership and we're fully supportive of it. The Pave Ahead program is all about these partnerships. We have a seat at the American Society of Concrete Contractors (ASCC) Concrete Pavement Committee, where we've helped developed the Concrete Parking Lot Tool Kit. Our Boot Camps teach our partners proven



best practices. Our Design Assistance Program (DAP) provides the pavement designs that equalize the playing field between flexible and rigid pavements.

The most successful contractor attendees of our Concrete Parking Lots Boot Camp have two things in common: a dedicated market development person and open communication with their ready mix producers. Working together, they have expanded their market share to the tune of millions of square feet.

On the downside, I can cite several large projects where concrete pavement was never really an option because the contractor was not willing to present a concrete alternative for fear of jeopardizing a bid to the owner. A strong partnership could have reinforced the contractor's position.

Another word that popped up frequently in our discussions was trust. Historically, our industry was not very trusting. But slowly we've made headway in changing our ways. Going back to the days of the RMC 2000 movement, we learned that our opposition is not the contractor or even the other producer down the street. Trust is key to a solid partnership. And partnerships are what will move us forward.

Because concrete can't place itself! ■

*Phil Kresge can be reached at [pkresge@nrmca.org](mailto:pkresge@nrmca.org).*