

## “IF YOU EVER MAKE IT TO EASY STREET, STAY THERE!”



JAMES WARNER

Those were the words of American financier and philosopher Bernard Baruch nearly 100 years ago. Baruch was the Warren Buffett of his time and well-known not only for his riches but also his many quotable quotes related to investing and obtaining wealth, most of which are as valid today as when first made. So what does this have to do with ICRI and concrete repair?

Plenty! ICRI has made it to easy street; we are the world leader in concrete repair!

During the extraordinarily successful ICRI 2013 Fall Convention 25th Anniversary meetings in Chicago, IL, some of us “old timers” were reminiscing about earlier days in our industry and the founding and amazing progress of ICRI, including its positive influence on the industry.

In earlier times, concrete repair was looked down on, as were the people specializing therein. After all, concrete was this wonderful material that was so great, it should last forever. But it didn't! Especially with the flurry of “newer” structures built following World War II. So, specialty materials for concrete repair started appearing in the late 1960s. The salesmen did their jobs well: designers believed the marketing fluff and specified the new specialty compounds, often inappropriately, and they seldom worked well. Many early failures occurred, with the contractor usually taking the blame. Whereas engineers and designers had technical organizations with educational programs, none existed for contractors.

Then came World of Concrete in 1974. The founder, Bill Avery, had a singular vision: helping contractors. Not only was the overall show directed to contractors, but an educational program specifically addressing their needs and giving accurate knowledge was provided. Alas! The repair problems were not all the fault of contractors, but very often the result of inappropriate methods and/or materials that had been specified. Concrete repair was a specialized area in which few designers often engaged, although there were many contractors dedicated thereto. And they were learning that their specialized knowledge often exceeded that of the designer. But...they were just contractors; who would listen to a contractor? The industry needed an authoritative resource, so in 1988, 61 individuals—mostly contractors—gathered, and what is now ICRI was

formed: an organization to bring together contractors, designers, and material providers, all as equals, in order to improve the quality of concrete repairs.

Those early members were all practice-oriented, and they were motivated—really motivated! Within the first year, the *Concrete Repair Bulletin* appeared. Six months later, the first Technical Guideline was released and regional trade shows were established. Then came more guidelines, co-sponsorship of World of Concrete, and annual conventions—all within the first 5 years! So how did those early members do it? They were practice-oriented, enthusiastic, and *not burdened by bureaucracy!*

As ICRI grew, more designers and material specialists became active, which improved the technical input. And, as others began to notice, we collaborated with many other organizations (or did they feel a need to collaborate with us?), jointly published guidelines and manuals, and co-sponsored events. And unfortunately, with this growth, activities have slowed down, and with them, enthusiasm and effectiveness.

The technical input has also changed; at the ICRI 2013 Fall Convention in Chicago, only three of the 25 papers presented were by contractors. Not that this is bad—all were excellent presentations—but when the guys that actually do the work are absent, the many real-world lessons they experience daily are sometimes missed. We must keep balance within the organization. And let's not forget what made us great, nor attempt to join with or emulate other larger, broader, and more established organizations. After all, we are the International Concrete Repair Institute—not the biggest, or broadest, but *the* authority on concrete repair internationally. We've made it to easy street!

Let's stay there!

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