

# PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

## WOW! THEY DO THINGS BIG IN TEXAS!



DON FORD

S ometime around 2:00 p.m. on Friday afternoon, March 18, I finally road-mapped the convention hotel (you had to cut across an aisle of the Houston Galleria Mall to get to some of the meeting rooms) and things began to fall into place. Another round of kudos to Kelly Page, Dale Regnier, Caren Giles, and the CAM group for another successful conference. And a very special

thanks to the Houston and North Texas Chapters for hosting such special chapter events. They were both fun and exciting.

This has been a long winter, and as it winds down, we move into our busiest and, hopefully, most productive and financially secure part of the year. From a contractor's perspective, there appears to be a large amount of work available on the horizon.

Another point of interest from the contractor's perspective is how the bidding process has changed and evolved. Costs and estimates have been fine-tuned over the past 2 years, and now a contractor can effectively manage projects at a substantially lower margin than 24 months ago. An often overheard and repeated remark by this select group is "No way in h\*\*\* they can do it for that!!!"

It seems many companies, however, continue to operate in this low percentage mode. This has a domino effect that causes each of us to take a closer look at our own business. How many of us have established our success ratio by determining the number of successful bids versus the number of bids published? Do we really look at what we bid, or are we just machines turning out numbers? Is 5 to 10% an effective number? Do we look at whom we bid to? Who our top clients are? What is our most profitable service—sealants, concrete repair, strengthening, or something else?

The most comprehensive approach would be to take an in-depth look at the operations of each business with a concentration on your company's marketing plan. This is a simple task and can be fun when times are good. Because the economy is at a low point, however, many owners often find fault with the marketing operation. This is one of the biggest mistakes a company can make. The truth is, you never stop marketing your company if you want to succeed in the long run. Everyone in your company is a salesperson, and you need to adopt a verifiable and achievable goal. It has been said that "in order to get a project today you must have known the client for 30 years...and have the lowest price!" Although this might often be the case—especially during tight economic times—taking care of a client and maintaining that relationship is still the best way to profit in the industry. As engineers, manufacturers, and contractors, we still have to do what we say we are going to do, do it on time, and charge a fair and reasonable price for the services we provide. We can't be sucked into the low-bid syndrome. We want to maintain our reputations, which means that we must "stay the course."

It is never too late to take a close look at your company. Look at the past—at your best customers and most profitable projects. Track your bid successes and look closely at your marketing efforts. The public won't invite you to participate without knowing who you are or what you do.

Some of the best resources for information are your local ICRI chapter, national ICRI conventions, and the ICRI Web site. We all live in the same environment and face the same challenges. I have certainly been blessed with the opportunity to meet and network with the best in the business.

Let's all work together and make those halcyon days happen again!