

# PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

## BEING INTERNATIONAL



KATHERINE  
KLOSOWSKI-BLATZ

It seems reasonable that as we look at the future of ICRI, we should embrace the magnitude of the potential of this organization as an “International” institute. Some of our members conduct business in our own home towns, some across our own countries, and some across the world. In each case, as we branch out, we realize that the world is becoming a smaller place to do business and the need for service organizations such as ICRI, offers will continue to grow.

One year ago today, I became an “expat,” the magnitude of which is finally beginning to sink in. The journey has been an intriguing one which will offer some very valuable lessons I can bring to the Executive Board of ICRI. Having lived in eight states and having been what many would consider “well-travelled” in North America and Europe, I naively felt prepared for just about any relocation challenge. I didn’t realize just how limited the scope of that vision was until the day my boss walked into my office to ask, “What do you think about a move to Singapore?” Never having considered a move to Asia, I promptly responded, “I think I need to ask you to leave my office so I can Google it!” A quick wiki search yielded a map and some key quick facts: Singapore was a former British colony, a city-state of roughly 5.5 million people (at least 25% expats), 85 miles north of the equator (warm would be a blessing after my last assignment in Minnesota!), it was rated safe and clean with easy public transportation, and despite some seemingly strange laws about chewing gum, I was pleasantly surprised (and comforted) to learn English is its national language. I was off...

Upon my arrival in Singapore, that comfort manifested itself once again, albeit in a very different manner. While touring various properties looking for housing, I specifically asked to view underground parking garages, foundations, balconies, and façades. I saw concrete construction very similar to that with which I was so familiar in the United States. And just like the construction back home, guess what? Concrete cracks, it leaks, and steel corrodes! Naturally, my realtor could not fathom my fascination with all things concrete, but somehow that familiarity made me feel at home in my new surroundings. I eventually moved into a unit which was 8 months old and noticed that my bomb shelter (mandatory for all dwellings per the Civil Defense Shelter Act of 1997) showed signs of rust coming through the tile floor. Being an interior precast structure, this didn’t seem quite right, so the general contractor came to investigate it as well as my stainless steel balcony railings, which were pitting. His analyses deemed these manifestations as “normal,” proclaiming that the rust was not corrosion because “stainless steel doesn’t rust.” To this I responded, “Exactly! So then what is this made of?” (Deer in the headlights look followed). I learned my first valuable lesson: all contractors and applicators need ongoing education and training at some level. The experience prompted me to question,

“Wouldn’t it be great if ICRI had video training available regarding proper concrete removal, reinforcing bar coatings, good concrete cover, surface preparation, and finishings?”

My first trip in Asia was to meet customers in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Imagine the cultural affront I experienced upon entering a ladies’ rest room upon landing, expecting a typical western commode, and instead being greeted by a hole, a rope, and a hose! (I’ve a feeling we’re not in Kansas anymore, Toto!) After composing myself and exiting the lavatory, I got down to business and queried my customers about some of the greatest industry challenges they were facing. Not surprisingly, the answers included educating specifiers on the sustainable value of new technologies, quality controls in the field, and the availability and accessibility of industry-wide training. Somehow, and despite the “facilities,” my experience in Kuala Lumpur was just another typical day in the life in the construction industry. I noted that ICRI has the potential to be a resource to industry professionals around the world, as our issues certainly appear to be universal.

I am frequently asked about India and China. For one thing, they’re massive: each with over a billion people! Equally daunting is what could only be described as severe culture shock! The socioeconomics, cultural norms, and politics are so completely at odds with my own experiences. (I could write a book on the surge of emotions I experienced as I explored these countries, not to mention the fabulous cuisine, and I’d be happy to share my experiences over a cup of tea, with anyone who is interested!) I was fascinated to learn the construction industry in these countries has enormous potential and substantially higher growth rates than we see in the west. With these populations, you can imagine the infrastructure requirements and social conditions that must be addressed. Construction practices ranging from “dirt in bag” to high-end solutions are evident across the countryside and metropolitan areas. Socioeconomic dynamics are driving change in ways I never imagined, coming from essentially a one-country perspective. In both countries, one thing is clear: people depend on good quality infrastructure, safe urban areas, clean water, and comfortable housing. They need the construction industry to advance and grow. Building, preserving, and repairing assets in a sustainable way is essential to future success. ICRI can be a leader in providing training tools and guidance on best practice in these important markets.

I continue to present across the region: at a structural engineering conference on seismic preparedness in Jakarta, Indonesia; on sustainable repair and preservation practices in Bangkok, Thailand; and I’ve attended a corrosion conference in Darwin, Australia (where the ICRI surface prep chips were a hot topic!). I’ve encountered some of you and your associates at these conferences, and I’ve learned that despite language barriers, cultural differences, and social norms, we all have a few things in common: concrete is used in every country to build quality structures. And, no matter how hard we try to plan and engineer for perfection—concrete cracks, it leaks, and steel

# PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

corrodes. Poor placement and aggressive environments simply make matters worse.

ICRI is THE INTERNATIONAL CONCRETE REPAIR INSTITUTE and provides education, certification, networks, and leadership to improve the quality of repair, restoration, and protection/preservation of concrete and other material systems. (Our Mission)

Whether you are venturing outside your home town or halfway around the world, remember to embrace the differences that will open your eyes to a new perspective, and harness the power of our similarities. The world may still be a big place but

our industry is one of common ground, understanding and need for ICRI to be the center for repair leadership supporting a profession built on science and craftsmanship—making the built world safer and longer lasting. (Our Vision)

So, a year later, it is finally sinking in.

Concrete is the world we live in.

Sustainable preservation and repair is our universal language.

ICRI...we are the ties that bind.

Happy (Safe) Travels!