

Becoming an ACI Ambassador

Program provides speakers for international concrete conferences

by Larry Rowland

ACI has established a new program through which members act as Ambassadors of the Institute to ACI partners, ACI chapters, and other technical societies that organize international, concrete-related conferences. My introduction to the program came in July 2015 when I received an e-mail from ACI's Director of International Business Development, Bernie Pekor. As he explained, the Institute had been contacted by its International Partner, the China Concrete and Cement-Based Products Association (CCPA), seeking a keynote speaker for an upcoming conference. By completing the online application, CCPA requested that ACI provide a representative versed in decorative and precast concrete with an emphasis on glass fiber-reinforced concrete (GRC) in curtain walls and/or GRC components.

Pekor informed me that the International Advisory Committee, which administers the ACI Ambassador Program, was looking for members of ACI Committee 310, Decorative Concrete, who could speak on these topics and represent ACI at the 2015 International Decorative Concrete Technology and Application Conference in Beijing, China, that October. As Chair of ACI Committee 310, I was asked to recommend candidates to be the ACI Ambassador speaker for the conference. I provided the names of five committee members, including my own, and suggested Pekor also contact

John Jones, Chair of ACI Committee 549, Thin Reinforced Cementitious Products and Ferrocement, from whom he got more recommendations.

The International Advisory Committee reviewed the bios of the ACI members who were willing and able to take on this assignment. I was very pleased and excited when 3 weeks later they selected me to be the Ambassador speaker to the conference in China. As the program is structured, my personal travel expenses up to a reasonable limit would be covered and I was given the name of the contact for the conference in Beijing. From that point, my work as a formal representative of ACI began.

ACI Ambassadors are responsible for taking care of their own travel arrangements, obtaining the required visas or travel permits, and generally getting set up for the conference. The Institute does not pay for a spouse to accompany its Ambassador, but does recommend going into the host country a few days before the event to get acclimated to the surroundings. Because I saw this as an extraordinary opportunity to see China, I chose to have my wife accompany me at our expense. The sightseeing we did in China before and after the conference was well worth the investment.

Successful Transfer of Technology

The conference itself was very interesting. Our Chinese colleagues have

greatly benefited from the past two decades of tremendous growth to their domestic economy. Concrete is truly ubiquitous in Chinese cities that favor high-rise development for their highly populated urban centers. The conference attendees—mostly made up of CCPA members—were keenly interested in improving the acceptance of concrete in China as a high-quality product. They explained that concrete in China is known for its utility but its ability to present architectural finishes is undervalued. Architects and owners in China are much more likely to specify the use of glass, natural stone, or tile as opposed to decorative concrete.

Examples of dynamic concrete buildings, many of which were exemplary demonstrations of concrete's ability to look like natural or cut stone, were shown. The main conference room featured a full-scale mockup of a precast cladding system alongside displays from cutting-edge designers and some truly inspiring works of concrete art. Each presentation of the program with available English or Chinese translation supported the theme, "Innovation Makes Decorative Concrete Ubiquitous." Frequent attendees of ACI conventions would no doubt relate to my excitement to hear testimonials on the impressive concrete projects our Chinese partners have undertaken.

I found the people of China to be friendly and helpful in general and



The conference venue in Beijing

members of the CCPA to be particularly welcoming. Many conference attendees went out of their way to welcome me and express appreciation for ACI's involvement in the conference. I was glad I did some homework by downloading English translations of CCPA's and the Conference webpages and taking the time to learn a bit about Chinese business culture. I worked hard to make the content of my presentation unambiguous without references that might not translate clearly.

My Chinese hosts were kind enough to assign a translator/assistant to my wife and me for the conference and the day before the proceedings. With the exception of persistent traffic jams in the cities, travel in China was easy and my wife and I visited several areas in addition to seeing the sights in Beijing. With a few phrases and plenty of patience and good natured persistence on both sides, we were able to experience the wonders of this exceptional culture.

Be Prepared for a Worthwhile Experience

I strongly recommend the Ambassador program to anyone fortunate enough to be asked to represent the Institute in this way. I learned that Ambassadors should research the international organization they will be visiting. Many organizations have sent official delegations to the United States and the ACI website may

have good background for you to download.

Start early collecting your travel documents; we used a third-party processing service that made getting our visas more manageable. Ask for a direct contact from the host organization and let them know your desired itinerary. Be prepared to submit your presentation early; the CCPA asked that I send my slides to them a month ahead of time so they could translate them for the conference. Tailor the information you give so it is clear and represents the work of ACI.

As with anything worthwhile, ACI Ambassadors need to be prepared and invest in the process; however, the payback in experience and the satisfaction of representing the Institute in an international forum is well worth the effort.

Selected for reader interest by the editors.



Example of a precast cladding system, displayed in the conference hall



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