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THE PILE DRIVING CONTRACTORS ASSOCIATION

A driven pile is a tested pile

By Heather Hudson

If there's one thing Steve Hall is passionate about, it's the driven pile.

He'd have to be. As executive director of the Pile Driving Contractors Association (PDCA), his calendar is like a "Where's Steve?" version of the "Where's Waldo?" cartoon.

From PDCA headquarters in Orange Park, Fla., he regularly criss-crosses North America to represent the association at educational seminars, conferences and meetings that bring together the piling industry and the professions with which it intersects.

PDCA wasn't always this prolific. In fact, its origin story involves a meeting of a handful of people at an airport hotel.

"In 1995, there were a few forward-thinking, entrepreneurial-type individuals who believed in the benefits of representing the driven pile industry solely and independently without any conflicts from other foundations," said Hall.

Industry players and business owners quickly gravitated to the association that offered advocacy and a consistent voice in the industry, as well as educational programs and networking opportunities. While membership enjoyed a steady growth, things have really taken off in the last 10 years.

"When I came on in 2005, there were probably 250 members. Now we're up to over 900," said Hall. "As the organization has grown, the availability of resources expands exponentially."

Wealth of opportunities for driven pile

In earlier days, PDCA hosted an annual conference for members, plus a Design and Installation of Cost Efficient Piles (DICEP) conference for engineers. In 2002, they also began holding a Professors' Driven Pile Institute (PDPI) at Utah State University to teach engineering professors about driven piles, knowledge that they, in turn, bring to their classrooms.

Those conferences are still going strong, but PDCA has also added up to seven additional educational programs every year. Their latest annual conference (the association's 20th) in May was the largest yet, with more than 325 people registered, 50 exhibitors and two keynote speakers.

Membership also comes with access to a monthly newsletter, award eligibility and number of resources online, including Ask PDCA, a service that allows members to pose industry questions and receive responses from PDCA committees and/or other industry experts, usually within 24 hours.



Steve Hall, executive director of PDCA, speaking at the Annual International Conference & Expo 2016 in New Orleans, La.

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A professional development class at PDCA's headquarters in Orange Park, Fla.

Seven chapters and counting

While PDCA does the important work of advocating for the industry, nationally and internationally, seven local chapters have cropped up across the U.S.

"South Carolina formed the first local chapter about 12 years ago. They started to see other types of foundations making in-roads into the Charleston area. As a result, the market share for driven piles in that area started to diminish," said Hall. "They got together and formed the PDCA of South Carolina Chapter and started to advocate for driven piles with the local engineers and explain services and benefits of driven pile over other types of foundations, especially in the Charleston area."

PDCA provides advocacy support and an overarching foundation that helps chapters justify specific positions to local government, city council commissions and state issues. They also provide a structure that allows chapters to draw on the experiences of other chapters and garner support and resolutions to familiar challenges.

UPCOMING EVENTS

PDCA has a number of events over the coming months, including:

Seminar on Deep Foundation Integrity Testing and Wave Equation Analysis

Toronto, Ont. • Aug. 29, 2016

High Strain Foundation Testing Workshop

Toronto, Ont. • Aug. 30-31, 2016

17th Annual DICEP Conference

Charleston, S.C. • Sept. 21-22, 2016

Deep Foundation Dynamic Testing and Analysis

Seminar, Workshop and Proficiency Test
Cleveland, Ohio • Oct. 5-7, 2016

Seminar on Using Steel Bearing Piles and Sheet Walls in Infrastructures

Tampa, Fla. • Nov. 10, 2016

Inside PDCA

While volunteers run local chapters, PDCA is staffed by Hall, a program manager and office manager.

"We can do things as paid staff that [chapters] don't have the ability to do, such as put together *PileDriver* magazine, conferences and training and host the website and other resources that provide for marketing and visibility."

Governance is through the board of directors and PDCA staff implement the directives they put forth. Committees that set the priorities of the association include:

- Educational Committee: Identifies important courses for the industry and develops educational programs
- Market Development Committee: The brainpower behind the PDCA annual conference and everything associated with it, except for the educational component
- Technical Committee: Addresses all technical issues associated with industry specific codes and specifications
- Communications Committee: Handles the magazine and all editorial content for the association
- Membership Committee: Promotes membership growth and retention
- Chapters Committee: Works to collaborate on resources, programs and activities that can help chapter services, benefits and growth

Why should Canadian companies consider PDCA membership?

"It doesn't make any difference whether you're from Canada or one of the other 17 countries represented by PDCA: pile driving is pile driving. The issues associated with the pile driving industry aren't going to be exactly the same as they would be in Southern California or Canada or Florida, but a lot of the generalities are the same," said Hall. "Some of the technical issues that contractors in Canada face are similar to the issues we face in the U.S. and other countries."

Mike Justason, a civil engineering lecturer and program chair at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ont. agrees. As

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– Steve Hall, PDCA

former PDCA education committee chair (he’s also held every position on the board of directors), he experienced firsthand the benefits of being an international member.

“The benefits of PDCA are pretty much the same for Canadians as they are for Americans. The opportunities for networking and the direct access to top industry experts are the real attractions for me,” said Justason, who worked for Birmingham Foundation Solutions in Hamilton for 18 years.

Hall estimates that more than half of the 40 international members are from Canada, ranging from Fort McMurray, Alta. to Fredericton, N.B.

Many educational programs PDCA puts on are in Canada, including Edmonton, Calgary, Vancouver, Toronto and Montreal.

“We are making very successful in-roads into the Canadian market and understand that if we want Canadian pile drivers, we need to bring those educational programs to the major cities across Canada,” said Hall.

The future of PDCA

The association has enjoyed rapid growth over the years to keep pace with the driven pile industry. Hall says he’s proud of the work accomplished to represent members and enact appropriate changes to code and specifications. He also notes the much closer association the industry has now with engineers.

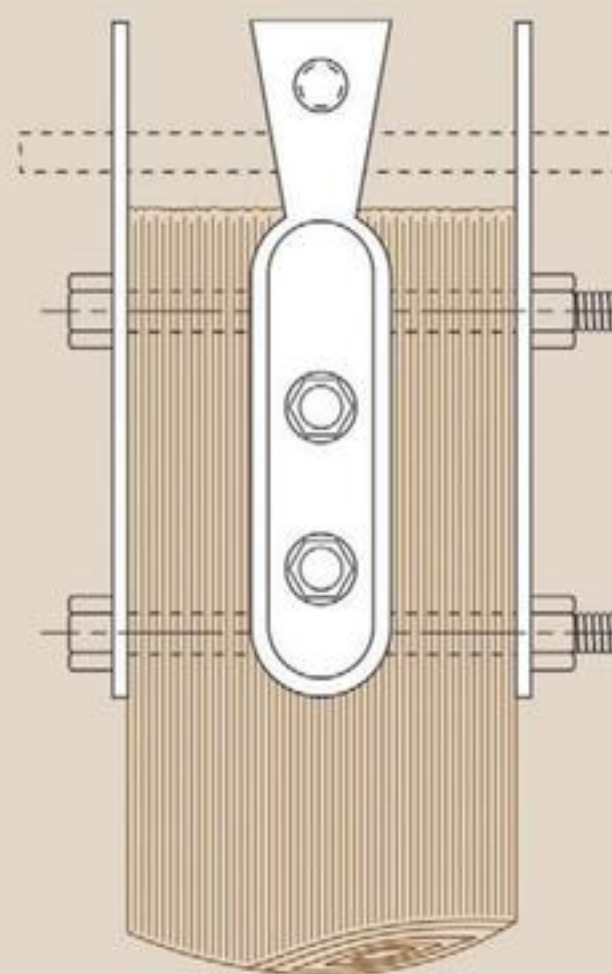
“The expansion of our educational programs has been a tremendous help in promoting PDCA. There are so many more people now in the pile driving industry that we can rely on to be speakers in our general sessions,” said Hall. “And we have resources for members who are struggling with issues on job sites anywhere. In general, PDCA’s growth has allowed us to represent the industry in a much more qualified, concerted effort.”

He says the future is full of conferences, educational program and opportunities for work with coalitions in other industries.

“We’ll continue to build relationships with engineers, academicians and other important figures from whom we can learn and influence,” said Hall.

As for Hall, the breakneck pace of his work is scheduled to change dramatically when he retires in 2018. He expects his successor will have the same passion and vision he’s brought to the association. And he or she better have the energy. ☺

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