



Rachel Seykora

Rachel Seykora learned about the concrete industry from the ground up, working with her father at the family business—Owatonna Concrete Products, Inc., in Owatonna, Minnesota. It was not a very glamorous beginning for someone who would go on to become a commercial sales representative for Cemstone Products Company in Minnesota, one of the largest producers of concrete in North America.

Seykora's first job at age 10 at Owatonna Concrete was bathroom cleaning duty, a humbling but educational experience. Not to be deterred from her goal of making extra money, she was promoted to building maintenance, where, over summer vacation, she painted every building while enduring 90-degree heat. By middle school, she was finishing concrete and driving a skid loader.

"If we had extra concrete from a job, I would have to finish it by myself," Seykora said. "I started laying out strips of concrete in our yard. We did not want to waste it, so we would use it."

Under her father's guidance, she learned all aspects of the ready-mix concrete business and the value of relationships between a business and its customers.

"I helped load blocks on trucks and also did a lot of clerical work when they needed help," Seykora said. "I would answer phones and handle questions from contractors and homeowners. I learned from listening to my dad."

While attending St. Mary's University, she worked at Owatonna Concrete as an assistant manager, facilitating training sessions and selling products. For something a little different, she also worked with the local chamber of commerce. She went from interacting with mostly men at the family business to working with all women at the chamber.

"I saw both ends of the spectrum," she said. "And I learned a lot because in sales you have to be a chameleon, so I would adjust my method of communication accordingly."

For two years after graduating in 2004 with a bachelor's degree in marketing and management, Seykora worked for a copier company and learned cutthroat sales. But that was not her style, so she returned to concrete.

"I missed the relationships I had established with customers in the concrete industry," she said.

"People tend to care more about you when you work with them on a project. I liked working toward a common goal; I got that from my dad."

Seykora joined Cemstone in 2006 as a commercial sales representative. Her responsibilities include project estimating, project management, customer service and sales promotion. Her hands-on approach is what keeps her in the game.

She typically travels to commercial job sites and monitors progress through completion of the project while communicating regularly with her customers. She will be on site with quality control personnel during large slab pours, wearing her hard hat and steel-toed boots. She works with engineers and architects, and she participates in safety meetings.

"It shows the customers that we care and that we are delivering what they are asking for," she explained. "My involvement does not end until the project is done."

Seykora bids jobs for the St. Paul and Minneapolis areas. The process begins with a search in her territory to see who is bidding a project and what it entails.

"We have to estimate and quote all our customers prior to bidding, and lately the challenge has been finding projects and seeing who is on the bidders list," she said.

Seykora views her job as a constant education and learns something new with each project.

Her largest project is the Regions Hospital Expansion in St. Paul, Minn. Construction of the \$179 million project started in 2007 and involves more than 40,000 cubic yards of concrete. There will be a 12-story addition to the hospital's main building, including 216 private rooms, 20 new operating rooms,

an upgraded emergency center, an underground parking garage for 400 vehicles and a roof slab. When completed in fall 2009, the expansion area will connect to the district's energy heating system.

In addition to her work with Cemstone, Seykora is active in concrete-related organizations and recognizes the value in networking, education and promotion. She recently completed a two-year term on the Minnesota Concrete & Masonry Contractors Association (MC&MCA) Board of Directors and is currently serving another two-year term; she is co-chair of the Excellence



Commercial Sales Representative, Cemstone

by Maria Orem

Awards, which is an annual event that promotes the industry as a whole and showcases the best workmanship and projects. Seykora was named to the Associated General Contractors (AGC) of Minnesota Board of Directors for 2009 and to the Construction Leadership Committee (CLC) Board of Directors. The CLC's main focus is educating the younger generation about all aspects of construction.

"The Minnesota Concrete and Masonry Contractors Association and the Associated General Contractors of Minnesota are tremendous groups, and we're proud to have someone from our organization represented on their boards," said Cemstone President Thor Becken. "Rachel Seykora is an asset to our company, and she brings a wide range of skills to these associations."

The MC&MCA, a non-profit trade association established in 1964, is committed and dedicated to the production and delivery of quality concrete and masonry goods and services. There are 113 member companies in Minnesota.


AGC of Minnesota is a statewide association of general contractors, specialty contractors and affiliated suppliers involved in the construction of buildings, highways, and heavy

industrial and municipal utility projects. The organization was founded in St. Paul in 1918.

Seykora also is active with the Emerging Green Builders and is just beginning to work with that group on a joint effort to promote LEED and green building.

"Cemstone has a big focus on sustainable technologies and high-performance expertise from our mix designs, service, equipment and people," Seykora said. "Our performance-based concrete offers many benefits, including cost savings, increased strength and durability." She added that Cemstone's product promotes innovation, and is matched to fit the intended use.

Founded in 1927, Cemstone operates more than 50 ready-mix concrete plants in Minnesota, western Wisconsin and northern Iowa. The company operates a fleet of blue Cemstone ready-mix trucks, features a complete line of pumping and placing equipment, and is the concrete supplier for the new I-35W bridge. For more information, visit www.cemstone.com.

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