



MID-STATES
CONCRETE INDUSTRIES



STRIVING TO BE THE SAFEST & MOST INNOVATIVE PRECAST BUILDING COMPANY



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Headquartered in South Beloit, Illinois, Mid-States Concrete Industries celebrated its seventieth anniversary in 2016. It was originally founded as Mid-States Concrete Products by Charles V. Harker in 1946, and today is known as Mid-States Concrete Industries. The company employs approximately 250 employees.

Written by Anne Lindert-Wentzell

Innovation. It is an intimidating concept for some companies. Not because they do not possess the talent or resources to do something new, but because they falsely assume that what has made them a success up to this point will continue to drive growth moving forward. Innovation is scary because it requires risk taking. There are no guarantees that every attempt at innovation will work out.

But in a hyper-paced, ever-evolving and competitive arena there is no room for complacency. Companies that are successful acknowledge that mastering innovation is never an option; it is the new reality, and it is the new reality for clients.

Innovation does not scare Mid-States Concrete Industries. In fact, it thrives on it. So much so that it aims to be the world's safest and most innovative precast building company.

This family-owned-and-operated company is a single-source provider that manufactures and installs precast concrete products in the commercial, educational, institutional, multi-family, single family, senior living and industrial sectors. Its

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products include wall panels, beams, columns, balconies, hollow-core planks, and CarbonCast insulated wall panels in a selection of architectural finishes.

The company serves southern Wisconsin, as well as the northern part of Illinois, and eastern Iowa. It has experienced exceptional growth which is attributable to both its variety of products and the increased demand for precast solutions.

Every project is unique and carries its own set of challenges the company is eager to address with its select team of engineers, designers, and production crew. "It really comes down to learning who our customers are and what their goals are," says Jeremy Olivotti, the company's vice president of preconstruction. "And that sets the entire focus of the process."

From the initial acceptance of a project, Mid-States Concrete Industries' team asks the pertinent questions to discern what a client wants and needs. After that, company experts are actively involved in designing, assessing constructability, and addressing all safety requirements. "We work with [clients] to define the goals of the project," adds Jeremy.

This collaboration with the client carries through every stage of the process. "We make sure that everything exceeds what the goals were on the project when we turn it over," says Jeremy.

"Every project that we do has its own unique set of challenges," says Hagen Harker, company president and grandson of founder Charles V. Harker. "Our job is to understand what the challenge is to make sure we assign the right people on the team and ask the right questions."

These issues may be related to engineering, constructability, a customer's schedule or securing manpower. "Our job is to empower our team to understand what those issues are, anticipate any problems coming their way, make sure we deliver on our promises and exceed their expectations," Jeremy says.

Mid-States has a plant certified by the Precast Concrete Institute (PCI) and is a PCI certified erector. Being a member of PCI ensures that the company meets the American Concrete Institute

(ACI) and the American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM) standards.

Mike Wolff, vice president of safety and operations, says that the manufacturing plant is A1 (architectural precast products), C3A (prestressed straight-strand structural members), B3 (prestressed straight-strand bridge beams) and B3 Illinois certified.

"We have to be meeting those quality standards one hundred percent of the time," to be a PCI member, he says, adding that Mid-States receives two unannounced quality audits by PCI annually. "It absolutely ensures that we're doing it right every time ... It also opens opportunities for continuous improvement within our facility [and] networking with other companies and organizations to further innovation, our safety and the quality of our products."

Mid-States Concrete Industries views safety as its greatest responsibility. "We own it. In this industry, we absolutely own it," says Hagen. "You won't find another company that is doing and thinking what we're doing and thinking with respect to safety."

"It is at the forefront of everything we do at Mid-States," affirms Mike. "Safety and the health of our employees comes above everything else ... We're going to change the world by being the safest and most innovative precast building company." He ▶▶





- ▶ explains that every employee has the ability to shut down production if a safety hazard or imminent danger is recognized.

Mid-States takes great pride in its newest safety initiative – the SafeStart Program – which offers error reduction techniques to lower the likelihood of injuries both at work and at home. SafeStart addresses the four components that result in accidents: complacency, fatigue, frustration, and rushing.

Mid-States employees are, “absolutely the most important thing to us,” says Hagen. “Great companies are built not on great products or great services, but they’re built on – and with – great people who are able to contribute.”

The company’s safety foundation was originally built in partnership with the United States Department of Labor’s Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), with which it is closely aligned. “We have partnered with OSHA. OSHA are Mid-States’ friends. We work with them. We invite them into our plant once, even twice a year, to do audits,” says Mike.

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He adds that the company is in line to receive OSHA’s SHARP (Safety & Health Achievement Recognition Program) award, possibly this year. In the future, Mid-States is also considering applying for Gold Star Voluntary Protection Program (VPP) status, an OSHA initiative that encourages the prevention of workplace injuries through training, hazard prevention and cooperation with both management and employees.

Additionally, to curtail lung cancer, silicosis, COPD and kidney disease, OSHA recently announced a rule to protect American workers from the health hazards from inhaling silica dust. Mike explains that PCI has formed a specific silica task force and has been educating members and taking corrective actions and engineered controls to, “deal with the new silica standard ... Mid-States, always, when it comes to safety and health of their employees, goes above and beyond the standards. We look at those OSHA guidelines as a baseline and try to exceed those standards in many cases.” The company is already looking at preventative measures to, “control silica exposure to the new PEL (Permissible Exposure Limits) limits.”

“It’s been a lot of hard work and a lot of evolution, but along with the improvements in safety, improvements in quality[and] improvements in efficiency, continuous improvements have happened because of that journey,” Mike says.

Every new employee must attend a two to three-day floor training safety orientation program conducted by union trainers. “We’ve found a true value in good production quality training out on the floor,” says Mike.

In 2013, Mid-States became a member of the Altus Group, a name well-known to the concrete industry for advancing precast technologies. Becoming a member of the Altus Group underlines Mid-States’ commitment to be a leader in such technologies as Altus’ CarbonCast insulated wall panels, which Mid-States now produces.

The U.S. Department of Energy suggests that at least forty-two percent of a building’s energy consumption is lost through heat transfer to the exterior. CarbonCast insulated wall panels integrate ultra-strong, noncorrosive carbon fiber grid and these panels offer structural superiority, safety, and better acoustics. They also have a lower carbon footprint and, perhaps more importantly, a long service life.

Jeremy says that Altus Group is, “a group of the best and most advanced precasters in the country, sharing different ideas and improving practices. So, we’re always learning from each other ... We tend to challenge and push each other to new levels.”

Mid-States also conducts leadership training based on author, speaker, and pastor, John Maxwell's book, *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*. The company has ten internal leaders in its class at a time.

"We run through all twenty-one laws," says Jeremy. "Everybody in here is a leader at some point in their life. If you truly want to grow a company, you grow them by growing the leadership of the company. We invest the energy into our team to give them the extra tools."

Investing in people is key in the current marketplace. During the recession, numerous trades and tradespeople left the industry, so finding the right people can be a challenge. However, "one of the big things is understanding the potential trends," Hagen says.

Hagen explains that it's a question of understanding what customers deal with every day; there is much uncertainty within companies regarding constant changes within the industry. For a business owner, this is the real task. For Mid-States, knowing that it has the best people working on projects is its assurance of providing exemplary products and service.

He suggests that one of the best means of reducing risks are, "your partners that you partner with every day. This is where precast has a tremendous advantage to other systems." By buying into a precast system, "you're gaining certainty right out of the gate. You're gaining certainty on quality; you're gaining certainty on price, and you're gaining certainty on the job site [and] speed and erection. Those factors all play into it."

He states that being involved in the industry for over seventy years means that, "I think we're fairly unique here at Mid-States." Customers trust the Mid-States name because of its experienced and skilled people who truly listen to customers' needs. "That's how we make a difference in the marketplace."



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**Congratulations Mid-States
on all of your achievements!**

Hagen suggests that "ultimately, it's not about us. This is really about what we do for our customers ... It's how you care for your people ... We're moving so quickly forward on things that we always see new ways and better ways to operate."

The biggest asset is "the strategic ownership type thinking that our people do every day to make our customers life easier, solve their problems and create solutions for them ... Our customers know that we're here for them." ■

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