

David Borger: Poise and Intelligence



David Borger's (right) service as a DFI trustee was acknowledged by DFI President Dan Brown during the 2017 Annual Conference.

As high school was winding down, David Borger was deciding on a major and expressed to his father that he did not want to sit at a desk all day. He was more interested in solving problems and building things than in being a people person.

Ironically, civil engineering led him to Skyline Steel, where he has spent the last 20 years sitting in front of a computer, talking on the phone all day, and even more so, enjoying it.

Today, Borger is widely admired for his engineering insights, intelligence and leadership skills. He chose to study at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign because of its excellent reputation for civil engineering. He began with the idea of focusing on transportation, but eventually settled on a combination of structural and geotechnical engineering, which has served him well at Skyline. There was no family pressure to study engineering, but his father, who studied general engineering, thought he would like the hands-on nature of civil engineering. His three siblings include Jim, who is a math professor in Australia, Melanie, director of athletic programs in Oklahoma City, and Michael, who works in solar energy in California.

After graduation, he answered a newspaper ad for a job at Skyline Steel in Parsippany, N.J., and has been there ever since. At the time, Skyline was owned by Arbed, which sent an expatriate to Skyline Steel's engineering department every three years. Borger's boss, Phillippe, was one such young expatriate but died tragically

about a year after Borger was hired. Borger was thrust into a leadership role in what he describes as a trial by fire. Those first few months after Phillippe's death were difficult, but he learned a lot, not only in engineering, but also in how to work with demanding customers, both internal and external. Through the years, Arbed became Arcelor and then ArcelorMittal, and Skyline, remaining relatively unaffected, was eventually purchased by Nucor.

Borger enjoys the "mental exercise" of helping potential customers come up with the best solution to their problems. He gets calls from an array of engineers who want direction as to how to use the company's products.

Plenty of Borger's colleagues think highly of him. Laurent De Mey, president of Skyline, says Borger is one of the most interesting individuals he has ever come across. "He has a unique way of looking at everything and is one of the most talented teammates in our industry. He has a humble, yet firm personality, and is never afraid to speak his mind, but is somehow affirmative and intriguing all at the same time."

Rob Waudby, district sales manager at Skyline Steel, cites Borger's "awesome sense of humor and equally awesome leadership skills. When he talks, others listen." Waudby adds that Borger has design acumen, an understanding of deep foundation issues, plus a thorough knowledge of field installation. Waudby sees designs he thinks are "not installable" except that Borger can figure out a solution. He added that Borger's most impressive traits are "poise and intelligence, and he brings these to bear in a way no one else in the company can."

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Another Skyline Steel district sales manager, Nam Nguyen, cited Borger's understanding of boundaries in communicating well without overstepping and possibly offending someone. Borger is a valuable asset, according to Nguyen: he makes others more confident when he comes to a project team. "When you think there is no way to solve an issue, Borger finds a solution."

Michael Carter, East Coast manager of Blue Iron Foundations and Shoring, says "Borger is a fantastic resource for examining one's ideas, in that he can work through complex deep foundation issues in a wide swath of the U.S. A rule in physics states, 'the load goes to the stiffer element,' and David carries that load."

DFI Experience

Borger says he gets a lot of value from his active engagement with DFI. He meets other people, such as equipment suppliers, contractors and engineers and tries to use these moments to learn more about the industry. These exchanges are fun, he says, and

believes everyone benefits from the participation. Borger was a DFI trustee until he termed out in 2017, after serving for nine years. Borger likes committee work and has sat on four DFI Technical Committees: Driven Piles; Sustainability; Marine Foundations; and Manufacturers, Suppliers and Service Providers.

Sorrow and Strength

Borger's admirable career seems like a series of successes, but he's also dealt with some formidable personal challenges over the years. His wife, Amanda, died in 2016 after nine years of fighting cancer. She was a graduate of Johns Hopkins University, and worked researching macular degeneration and then overseeing pharmaceutical projects up to four months before her death. Clearly a courageous woman, she wanted children, and to that end, she and Borger hired gestational carriers to have them even as she fought her illness. Son Nicholas is seven years old but Paul, nearly a year old, was born after her death. Borger has a new partner, Nicole, who has a four-year-old son of her own. The couple recently bought a new house for their new life. The three boys in the family are fortunate enough to have multiple sets of grandparents, including Amanda's mother and father. It is hard to imagine that Borger has any spare time but he manages to play volleyball, go caving and read books.

David Borger has a big load to handle. If his life so far is any guide, he will succeed in applying his skills and intelligence in ways that will continue to benefit DFI and the profession.

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