

Oral History Interview

with

MIKE LIDDIARD

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Reno, Nev.

By Michael R. Adamson

Adamson: Let's begin. I'm going to start with the story that Alan Murk told in his interview. What I sent you is basically the transcript of that story. Alan Murk recalls that Pankow was just getting started on a project in Bellevue, Washington, in 1967 and called you "this young fellow," came up to him and knocked on the trailer door one day. And he said, "Come on in," and you said, "I'm on my way to Alaska to go to work. I'm a carpenter from Salt Lake, and I'm on my way to go to Alaska, and I ran out of money. I'm here. I need a job."

Alan Murk asked you what you could do, and you replied that you could do anything that [he] wanted [you] to do. So the project was getting ready to start, and so Alan hired you. Is that pretty much how it went down?

Liddiard: Well, basically that's almost exactly the way it went down, except I didn't run out of money, but I called the fellow in Alaska that I was going to go to work for, and he said, "Well, the job isn't going to start for about eight weeks, so don't come up here. It costs so much to live here in Alaska, you'll go broke." So basically I just stayed overnight in Bellevue that night and called the fellow, and then I drove down the street.

They were just putting up the fence around this project, and I knocked on the door. Alan, he came to the door, and I told him I was looking for a job. And he said, “What can you do?”

I says, “Any damn thing. I’ve been a carpenter by trade, built homes, but I can do anything you got.”

So he actually said, “Well, if you can get a clearance out of the union, come to work tomorrow morning.”

I built all the sawhorses and the sheds and set up the saw table and prefabbed all the forms before—I was the only guy there for quite a while, so basically that’s the way it evolved. I didn’t tell him at that time that I was going to be leaving in about eight weeks, because I wanted the job, but after working with him and found out how organized he was and just how the job was run, I decided to stay. So that’s how it evolved. Basically that’s the same story, a little different.

Adamson: Before we go forward from that point, why don’t we just back up and you can give me a summary of how you ended up in Bellevue, Washington, from where you started out and what you were doing before you ended up in Alan Murk’s trailer.

Liddiard: Basically I was in Utah and I was building homes for people, and it was such a tight market that I could—and I had a partner, and I could just hardly make a living for as hard as I was working, you know. So I met a fellow from Alaska and he says, “Well, go to work for me. You can make a lot of money.” At that time they were doing the pipeline. So basically I had one house to finish up, and I finished that house up. When I

got it done, turned it over to the owner, and I just packed up, basically, my tools and my truck and was headed for Alaska.

Then when I got to Bellevue, Washington, I thought I'd better call and make sure everything was all right before I headed up through Canada and then on the Alcan Highway. He said, "Well, everything looks good, but we're about eight weeks behind." So that's basically what happened.

Right out of high school I started as a carpenter, well, basically as a laborer, working for a fellow, and he was doing a lot of work for the government at that time, and we built some homes and apartments down at the south rim of the Grand Canyon, and we built the Visitors Center in Bryce Canyon, Utah. And at that time we did everything. I mean we dug the foundations, we tied the rebar, we made the concrete on site. On site we made our concrete, we poured it, and basically I learned the trade from doing everything, touching every piece there was. It was kind of like the design and build, only you got a plan to go. So it worked pretty well when I went to work for Pankow.

Adamson: This building in Bellevue, Washington, was a—

Liddiard: As I remember, it was a thirteen- or fourteen-story precast concrete building, which I'd never done any precast, and that's another thing that intrigued me about Pankow. And basically it was Alan Murk, because he was so organized. Once we got the job going and I went down and I built the casting yard, we cast our own beams, and we cast our own precast floor plank. At that time that's the way we did it, and we

stretched them with stressing cables, and then we built our own precast panels right on site. We stored them and then picked them and set them in the building as it went along.

So basically that's what I was doing for Alan, is I ran the casting yard. It was quite interesting. I think it was about 350 feet long, and it rained so much there that we built a tent to go over this thing, and we built it so we could slide it back on cables and then lift the precast plank and beams out of there. We had one crane, which we picked the precast and stored it, and then when it got time to erect it as the structure went up, then we picked it from the storage yard and set it right into the building. So that was very unique where you're able to do it with one crane, where you can cast it, pick it out of the beds, and then set it right in the building. So, very interesting work.

Adamson: At what point did you call the guy in Alaska to tell him you weren't coming?

Liddiard: Well, actually, he called me and said, "Well, you can come on up now."

And I said, "Well, you know, I think I'm going to stay here. I'm right in the middle of a project, and I'm going to stay here and finish it up." And I didn't know what was going to happen from there. I'd never been told that I had any future or anything at that time. But it was very interesting, and so that's why I stayed, and basically because of Alan. Alan has a way of—he's a good organizer, which I was not used to over the years working with people that weren't that organized, and I liked him. I liked to have a schedule and beat it. So that's why I stayed.

Adamson: Was there any sense even on that project, one, beyond Alan Murk, of the way Pankow built buildings? And at what point was there a sense that you might keep working for Alan after that project was done?

Liddiard: Well, basically, when we finished up the project, the structure, and Alan left and he went down to San Jose, he left me there with one engineer, and basically there wasn't a lot to do except for we were doing tenant work at the time, and so there was a few doors to hang, whatever the tenant needed. Most of that was done anyway. So it was basically just a hang-on job to do one day's work in a week. You know what I'm trying to say.

He told me that, if he could, that he'd get me on the next project, and then, of course, I never heard another word from him. Actually, we had a cafeteria in that place, and me and the engineer were sitting there having coffee one morning, and the operation manager, which was Bob Carlson at the time, he came by and he says, "Alan wants you in San Jose."

At that time I only had the one child, so it wasn't much to picking up and moving, so it was pretty easy at that time. So actually, I just rented a U-Haul. Of course, the company paid for all that. But I just rented a U-Haul, threw what few belongings I had in that, hauled it down to San Jose, and we started that San Jose PT&T Building downtown.

Adamson: Alan stated that you worked with him for about five years and then the company put you in charge of projects of your own. Before we go through a couple of those projects, I just want to run a quote by you of Alan Murk's, talking about this

process, developing the people on the job site. And he put it this way: “That was the way the whole company evolved. You worked for somebody until you proved yourself, and then the opportunity came, and you were put in that position, if you wanted it. That’s the way people developed.” So my question to you, is that in a nutshell how people trained people?

Liddiard: Yes, basically it was, and Alan was a great trainer because he was always on top of his project. He knew exactly how it had to go together and he knew in which sequence it had to go together. You couldn’t help but learn. Actually, when we were working on that first building, he told me, he says, “Well, you keep up the good work and you’ll have your own project to do.” And that’s all he said. Anyway, I just went on and we built that building, and then we had some property there in San Jose and set up a casting yard to cast the next building, which was right next to that one, and a city parking structure right there in the same area.

It wasn’t after that project, but about another year or so after that that I got my chance to go to Portland to do the Portland West parking structure. So basically I was working with Alan on several projects, and then the opportunity came to do that project up in Portland.

Adamson: The one you supervised or ran?

Liddiard: Yes. That was my first superintendent’s project, and it was kind of baptism under fire on that job because we didn’t have enough people, so they didn’t send an

engineer up there with me. We hired an engineer out of Portland. Well, he was a good engineer, except for he worked about a week, and he started the precast drawings for me, and then he didn't show up for work for about a week. So I tried to get a hold of him, and then finally I called the agency that we'd hired him from. They says, "Uh-oh." He was a recovering alcoholic that had just got out of rehab, and he went out on a bender.

So basically there I was without an engineer, and we were right in the middle of doing the drawings for all the precast columns, and so I had to do that, plus all the other stuff so that I could get these drawings out to the precaster. Now, we didn't precast our columns onsite. We bought them from a company down—they cast them down in Eugene. So I had to get these drawings out in a hurry so that they could start casting so that they could be onsite by the time we got ready for them. [laughs] So that's a fast way to learn to—I had to do several people's jobs to get the project going. So it was a really good learning experience. I didn't like it at the time because I figured I was getting overworked, which I never ever thought that before, but I learned so much by having to do that, that it was very, very rewarding when we finished that up.

We cast our own wall panels onsite, and we had a little casting yard. There wasn't much room, about ten feet, as I remember, where the sidewalk was on that side, and we cast our own wall panels for the parking structure. But we bought our columns and beams from another precast outfit out of Eugene, and then they brought them by, and we picked them with a tower crane and set them in place.

Adamson: When you're a superintendent, how much does the design/build approach affect what you're doing once the building is started?

Liddiard: Well, basically, when you can design it and build it and you go through all that process, you know the project so well that you can schedule it exactly how you're going to do it. So basically that's another good thing about working for the Pankow organization, the superintendent is the bottom line. The buck stops with him. He makes all the decisions. He does all those kind of things. It's not decisions by committee. He makes the decisions, and it doesn't mean that everybody, your engineers and everybody don't get their input on the schedule, but bottom line is he makes sure the job goes. The superintendent, he hires usually all the field people so that you hire the people you want on the job, all your foremen. And then your foremen, they hire good men they've worked with before, and everybody has the same kind of work ethic to try to get it done. No matter what it takes, just get it done. So that's it.

Adamson: Having worked for Pankow for so long, I don't know if you have a basis of comparison, but what would you say is distinctive about learning on the job in the Pankow organization versus how it might have happened somewhere else?

Liddiard: Well, in the career before I went to work for Pankow, I was on jobs with people that were my boss that wasn't as qualified for me. So working for somebody that don't know what they're doing is pretty tough, and so you kind of have to muddle through. The nice thing about Pankow is they had quality people running the job. Just like when you mentor under somebody that knows what they're doing, then when situations come up that you need that, you already have been through that process, so it's

a lot easier. If you touch every piece and you know what every piece looks like, and you know how it has to go together, and you've learned from somebody that knows how, by then when a situation comes up after you have worked for somebody that's done it, then it's not exactly the same, but it's similar. So you can think on your feet, and you can, when everything isn't going your way, figure out a way to do it and make it work.

Yeah, on-the-job training with somebody that knows what they're doing is the best way to do. And Pankow did that, which impressed me my whole career, is they would hire engineers out of Purdue, really the top-quality engineers, but they didn't know anything about construction. They had to work as a field engineer on several projects before they knew how to build, and then they got their chances to become a superintendent or advance in the company. The company always, 90 percent of the time, evolved from within, only on occasion when we had so much work that we had to go outside of the organization to hire somebody that is not from the organization.

Adamson: What do you think was the most important thing you learned from Alan Murk in those early years?

Liddiard: Plan your work and work your plan. That's the most important thing I learned from him.

Adamson: Very good. When did you first meet Charlie Pankow, and what were your first impressions of him?

Liddiard: Actually, that was very unique for me, because it was on that Bellevue building. It was a bank building at the ground floor, and we had a vault that I'd set up to pour. A bank vault, it's got a lot of rebar, and I was right up on top with the concrete crew watching to make sure they vibrated it and the concrete went in right, and I was really involved in this pour, because we didn't want any flaws or anything in it. And looked out the corner of my eye, and here come a guy across the rebar on the deck of that vault, and he had his pant legs rolled up and he had his dress shoes on, and he was in a suit. He walked across there, concrete splashing on him, walked up to him, he says, "My name is Charlie Pankow, Mike. I hear you're doing a good job," shook my hand. He said, "There's plenty of room for advancement in this company, so you can go as far as you want to go." He turned around and walked off, and impressed the heck out of me, how he walked up there in his suit with his pants rolled up and shook my hand and said, "I heard you're doing a good job. Keep up the good work, and there's plenty of room in this company for advancement." So that was my very first impression. It impressed the heck out of me. That's one reason, I think—of course, Alan was the main reason—but that's one reason I decided to stay.

Adamson: Overall, even when Charlie was not around on building sites and so forth, how did the company, the character of the company reflect his personality?

Liddiard: Well, it reflected his personality because Charlie would never accept that it couldn't be done. He hired the people. Originally I think there was Alan and about three or four, five guys, and they started the company. Then, of course, that attitude is that no

matter what it takes, you're going to get it done, so they hire people that have that same attitude, and then they have to have employees under them working, so they hire the employees under them with that same attitude.

There was nobody in the company that was there because they were related or because somebody liked them or somebody forced you to have them on. You worked for Pankow, you were there because you had the ability to do it, and so it's not a personality contest. It's a "can you get the work done" contest. So it's basically the attitude of the whole company.

Adamson: Several people, Alan Murk included, mentioned that the superintendent was the linchpin of any Pankow project. That was where the rubber hit the road, as it were. You've already mentioned the Portland parking structure, so I get a sense of where I'm going with this. But using your experience after that, how can you illustrate how the superintendent is where the buck stops?

Liddiard: Well, the buck does stop with the superintendent, and he is the guy that has to set up the job. He goes to a new town, he's got to meet with all the city officials, and he's got to make sure that all the permits are in place, and then he has got to hire the crews and then get a work schedule going and sit down in the office and do your schedule and schedule your job. First off, you've got to schedule your whole job out yourself, with your engineer, and then you've got to sit down and do a schedule very week, and he heads that up. On a lot of Pankow projects, the design and build, the superintendent gets to sit down with all the structural engineer and the mechanical people and the plumbers

and give to them what is expected of them, the schedule that they have to keep, and he gets their input, from how much time they think it will take. Of course, his experience will tell him, well, these guys are trying to pad it a little bit, so they don't want to be pushed.

Basically, you have a meeting. The Pankow organization has a meeting every week with the architect, the engineer, and with the owner, to make sure that everything's on schedule. So then you've got to make sure that all your long-lead items are ordered way ahead, like your elevators. You've got to order them six months before you need them, six months to a year, basically. A lot of your mechanical equipment that takes a long-lead item, you have to make sure that that's ordered. So basically the superintendent has to stay on top of the day-to-day operations also, what's going to happen a year from that date.

And the superintendent is the guy that makes the job work. He doesn't have somebody coming out of the office that's not familiar with the job and telling him how to do his job. He gets to run his project the way he sees fit, and he either sinks or swims with that decision. So that's why I think that the Pankow organization is so successful in all these years, because they didn't have decisions made by committee; it was made by the guy that actually had to get the job done.

Adamson: You just mentioned meeting Charlie on the job site. Can you talk about Charlie visiting job sites on projects where you were the superintendent?

Liddiard: Oh, yeah, he was good at that. He was good at showing up on the job without any notice, and no matter, you might be in the middle of a meeting or whatever, but he would just kind of show up on the project. Now, if you were busy, he wouldn't bother you and try to pull you away from what you were doing, but you knew you wanted to talk to him, but he would ask you what was happening, "How's things going? Is there anything we can do to help you?" And if you did need anything, he would make sure that you got it.

He was quite active on all projects, not on a day-to-day operation, but he would just show up. Not saying not every week, not every month, but maybe one week he'd show up for a couple weeks and then you wouldn't see him for a couple months, and he'd just show up on the job. A lot of times I'd seen him walking around the job. He'd go in the office and get a hardhat, walk around the job, and if you were out somewhere, then you'd meet up with him on the job. So I think he liked to stay on top of everything that was going on.

Adamson: From Dean Stephan, who started around 1972, and Rik Kunnath, both of them talked about how as Pankow got bigger and did more projects in any given year and hired more people, how some of the formal structures of the company, like estimating or accounting, changed. Over those years, when those changes were taking place, what impact did that have on doing the job of a superintendent?

Liddiard: Well, basically there's some times that we had really a lot of work, and yet the superintendent didn't get any input into what his next project might be, because he was

busy finishing up a project. Then an estimator in the office would estimate the project and then the superintendent would maybe even not be quite done with the job but close enough that he could leave the job and leave it to a project engineer to finish up, and then he'd go on the [next] job.

Well, he didn't get any input on how the thing was estimated, so when he did the job, he may have to do some things that really weren't in the estimate to get the job done, which was pretty good because you could call up the guy that estimated the job and say, "Hey, you don't have anything in the job for this. What are we going to do?" So we'd make a cost code for that particular thing so if we ever did anything in the future that was similar to that, we'd have a cost basis of what it costs to do that. Even though we didn't have the money in the job to do that particular thing, if we had to do it again, we would know that, yeah, it's going to cost so much a square foot to do this. So that worked out pretty well. It was a tougher time when the superintendent didn't get any input on the job. You just had to go on the job cold turkey. But, again, people worked together, so it worked out. Not quite as efficiently, but it worked out.

Adamson: Bob Law, who happened to be the first person I interviewed on this project, gave me, I guess, a printout of a spreadsheet he had done, which he called "Pankow Innovation History." I matched up some of the things he was talking about with a list of projects you gave me—so stop me if you actually didn't work on a project that I'm talking about—but Bob cites the USC parking structure, which I think you worked on, as an example of a Pankow-initiated technique of casting precast columns on their side and then erecting them from the casting bed to minimize storage space and save time and

money, and I think that was also done on a couple mall projects as well. Can you describe, from someone who worked in the field, how that innovation worked?

Liddiard: Well, I did work on that project, but not in the initial parking structure. This is very interesting, because after I finished up the Portland West parking structure, I went down to that project they built about four years prior to that, and then that was my project to add four stories to the top of that structure.

What they had done on that structure is they had cast the columns so that they could be added to in the future. So we went into that project and we chipped the top of the columns off, which was about three or four inches, as I remember, and then there was sleeves cast in the top of those columns, and then we precast columns and set them up on top of that structure and grouted them in.

That was a very unique project, because we had to go to the center of that parking structure and chip out the center of it where the crane had set originally, set another tower crane in there, and pick these precast columns and set them on the beams and then pour the floors. Then once that was all put together, then we set another crane up on top of the small mobile crane to disassemble the big crane and set it down on the ground. So that was very innovative construction where you add to a structure that's already there, and they had designed that in. Pankow had designed that in when they did it, because USC didn't have enough money, as I understand it, to build an eight-story parking structure, so they built a four. Then they got another grant, and then we went back in and added another four stories to it. So, yes, that was very innovative on the way to do that project.

Adamson: So was it always envisioned eventually there would be eight?

Liddiard: Yes, it was designed originally to do that. As I remember, Tom Verti was the superintendent on that first project, and then I came back I don't know how many years later and then added the top to it. But, yeah, I worked on several parking structures where we precast the columns onsite, and that's innovative because you have a real small footprint. You have to precast your columns so that you can get to them and then pick them up and erect them, and you're actually casting all of your precast columns in the footprint of the parking structure. Then you stand them up. Of course, they're all braced off. I don't know whether you've seen any of the pictures of how it goes together. But you brace them with the braces down, and then you grout the bottom in, and then you set your beams on top of that. Then you come behind and build your floors, floor-by-floor, from beam-to-beam.

That's a very innovative way that Pankow came up with that design. We did a lot of parking structures at one time. I worked on several of those parking structures. I built one in Hayward. I built one in Kaiser in Oakland. I built another one in Kaiser in Walnut Creek.

Adamson: You stated after this USC parking structure project, you spent a year in the office estimating jobs and then returned to the field as a superintendent. What did you learn in that time estimating jobs that helped you in the field as a superintendent?

Liddiard: Well, I learned to be not quite so critical of estimators, and basically it was quite a good experience because there were several estimators estimating jobs at that time, and so they would come to me and say, “Well, this is what we’ve got. How would you do it?” And then they picked my brain how I thought it ought to be done, how many men would it take to do this particular thing. I didn’t really sit down and do all the estimating. I worked with the estimators on the method and how many man hours I thought it would take, and that was basically it.

At the same time, I was doing miscellaneous pickup jobs that were guaranteed work that we had to go back down and fix something on a project that we did, make the owner happy and stuff like that. So basically it was just they utilized me to help the estimators and just do some pickup work until they had another big project for me to do.

Adamson: There was an article in the company newsletter that called the YMCA Building and parking structure in Oakland, quote, unique in concept design, development, and construction, unquote, and very complex in both its execution and scheduling.¹ Based on your experience with that project, can you elaborate?

Liddiard: That was a great job, because the City of Oakland needed a parking structure and they needed a YMCA too. It was a design and build from day one, so we had to incorporate our precast columns or precast beams into a structure where we had swimming pools, we had workout rooms, we had steam rooms, we had shower rooms, and on top of that we had to put on another six-story parking structure on top of that.

¹ “Project of the Quarter: YMCA,” *CP News* 5 (Spring 1987).

So the design was quite unique to incorporate the precast system to go above the YMCA and then to coordinate all the mechanical that it takes to do the plumbing for the showers and the swimming pool. We hired a swimming pool consultant to show us how to do a swimming pool, and a consultant for all the steam rooms, all the shower rooms, and then, of course, the top portion of it, which was our expertise in precast columns and beams.

We cast everything on site, and we cast them in the sequence so that we could erect them. As I remember, we had a record on how many columns we set in a day. I wish I could remember the amount, but it's written up somewhere in the archives of Pankow. Everybody, after that, strived to see if they could do that many columns in a day, and I'm sure that somebody beat it after that, but I'm not sure. [laughs]

Adamson: There's another article later on in the company newsletter with regard to Marathon Plaza, what it eventually came to be called, and at least at the time it was the largest commercial concrete building in the city [San Francisco], consisting of a combination of precast and poured-in-place concrete. The article said that this was an optimal solution for this job.² My question to you is why that would be, and what was your experience working on that project?

Pankow: Well, that was quite a unique job for me, because when that job started, I was building the YMCA, and they had another superintendent do that project [Marathon Plaza]. That project wasn't going well, and they were having a lot of problems and a lot of cost overruns. Charlie Pankow came to me and asked me if I'd go take that job over,

² "Project of the Quarter: Marathon Plaza," *CP News* 6 (Spring 1988).

which was kind of a touchy situation, because there was already another superintendent running the job. So, of course, Charlie had always been good to me, and I'd always done anything he asked to do. It was just personally a hard thing to do. So I went over there and took that job over, and there was a lot of things that—I don't want to mention any names, but the guy that was running the job didn't do due diligence, and so we had to make some changes on the rebar. The rebar was detailed too big, and there wasn't room for the column forms to go around, and we had to change some of that stuff. Then the job wasn't scheduled properly. There was plenty of good people on the job, so I just went in and scheduled the job and brought all the engineers together.

It was quite unique because there was two tower cranes on the job, and it was like two buildings and they had to be coordinated. It's like you had to schedule one as one project and one as the other project, and then once you got the two projects scheduled, you could see how the conflicts were coming together. So that's what the job lacked, was the organization to make it go.

The reason for the poured-in-place and precast is because of the earthquake codes for that size of structure, you had to have some humongous columns and some beams to support the parking in that structure. You had commercial space and you had office space and you had parking space all in one structure, so that's why you had to coordinate and that's why it had to be designed structurally, poured in place and precast together. The size of the project, as I remember, was over a million square feet of office space on that project, and it had to be scheduled like two different projects all in one.

Adamson: Around about this time, for several reasons, one of which was Charlie Pankow's interest in perpetuating the company beyond his lifetime, the company reorganized—a couple of times before they got it right, apparently. For someone in your position, what impact did the reorganization have on you?

Liddiard: Well, it worked out well for me, because basically the only one that could own stock in the company were superintendents, and every time that they reorganized, the stock split, which I was able to buy stock early on as a superintendent. It basically helped me financially, the way the company was reorganized. But basically it did not change a lot on the method of building and the organization. We were quite big at that time, and the bigger the company gets, the harder it is to keep the quality of personnel. That's the only difference I saw.

Adamson: More generally, if you look at the seventies, eighties, nineties, from a high-level perspective, as you saw it, how did the company change and both how did that benefit working in the field, and perhaps if there are any downsides to that.

Liddiard: Well, the downsides to getting so many jobs is finding enough qualified people to do the jobs. Now, we always built the company from within, and when the company got a lot of work and not enough qualified people to do that work, then we had to hire some people from outside, which were not trained by the company, and so it was a little tougher to, as a company, make money on some of those projects.

Adamson: If I have Alan Murk's career correct, about the time that you're doing Marathon Plaza, going forward, I think he was operations manager.

Liddiard: I believe, yes. Yes, he was. I think that's about the time that he was the operations manager, which was very good for him, very good for the company, because he had probably was the best man in the company for that job, and he knew how to do a job. So he could go around from job to job and help anybody that didn't have the experience, give them some insight. If you were having any problem with personnel, then he's the guy that could get the job for you, get the people there to do the job, and he's the one that would have to relocate an engineer if he wasn't doing the job that you wanted him to do.

Adamson: Was that a relatively new position because of the size of Pankow, or was that something that was created just because someone identified the need to have somebody like that?

Liddiard: Well, we had an operations manager prior to that, which was Ralph Tice, and, actually, before that was Bob Carlson. But it wasn't needed that much when [until] Alan did the job, because at that time when Alan took it, we had a lot of things going, and operations manager was really needed at that time.

Adamson: I think I'm leaving the eighties behind with the next project. You mentioned that you then ended up in Hawaii in the Waikiki Landmark. My question is, this project,

as well as a number of projects, were truly landmark structures that made statements on the environment in which they were built. If you could, talk about the satisfaction you got from working on buildings that were not only technically innovative, but were significant additions to the built environment.

Liddiard: Well, that was really quite a unique project, because it was a large project and it was two buildings. It was actually three buildings, but it was two buildings, two large high-rises that you took up from two different spots. We had a lot of piles to drive in that coral, and driving piles on an island in Hawaii was quite unique. You might drive one down twenty feet where it goes to refusal, and you might drive one down ten foot away from it 120 feet before it goes to refusal. So that was quite unique in the piles we had to use for that and the number of piles. That project would have never been able to be built cost-wise if it hadn't have been [for] Pankow. I think several other companies had tried to do that, put that project together, but they could never do it for the amount of money.

[interruption]

Adamson: You were saying driving piles into the coral.

Liddiard: Basically, I was saying that the project would have never been done if it hadn't been for the people in Hawaii to be able to put this project together for the amount of money that the owner had to build it. Several other contractors had tried to do it and

couldn't, and they actually revived that project and were able to put it together under design and build under the owner's budget.

So we had the jumpform on that job, which is unique to Pankow, and we precast our own precast wall panels, and we incorporated the granite in the wall panels so that we didn't have to set the granite later. We cast it in the precast so that when we set it up, it was a finished product. That was quite unique.

As we got the structure up to the fortieth floor, then we had to bring the two structures together and add another five stories on top of that of penthouses and mechanical. So basically that was very unique project in the fact that we were able to do it for the money that the owner had and we were able to do it on a timely schedule. It had two condos that went up forty stories, and we added the penthouses on top of that. Then it had an eight-story parking structure with two swimming pools on top of that, and the retail space was under the parking structure on that side. So it was very satisfying job, very tough job to do. Building in Hawaii is a lot tougher to build than on the mainland.

Adamson: You're talking in terms of regulations or are you talking in terms of labor?

Liddiard: Labor, yes.

Adamson: How did you end up on this job? According to your list, that would have been the first one that you worked on in Hawaii.

Liddiard: Yup. Well, basically that's another project that wasn't going well, and Charlie Pankow came to me and asked me if I'd go over and take that job over. It was early in the project. We were still driving piles, so it wasn't a long ways along. It was just he had asked me to go over and do that job, and I told him I would.

Adamson: Did you commute or move your family?

Liddiard: Actually, I commuted, but I commuted five weeks at a time. I'd go over and I'd work for five weeks, then I'd fly back on Thursday night, and I'd stay Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, and then I'd come back on Monday and fly back to Hawaii. So, yeah, I commuted for the full time of that job.

Adamson: Almost like an [offshore] oil rig worker, but they're a little more regular in their on and off [time].

Liddiard: Yes.

Adamson: When you mentioned that you went to Greenville, South Carolina, as a consultant to the owner on a project in order to help the contractor finish a job that wasn't getting done, it struck me that this was an example of the Pankow approach of doing what it takes. Can you put that project in the context of that?

Liddiard: Well, basically it was for an owner that we'd done work for in New York, the owner that owned the shopping center [Roosevelt Field], and he had a contractor there in Greenville, South Carolina, that was way behind schedule, and he wasn't getting the job done. So basically the owner came to Pankow and said, "We're having a real problem getting this thing done. Is there any way you can help us out?"

So basically I'd finished up—not after the Landmark project, but after I finished the Landmark job, then I built the arena at Hawaii, and that was a design and build job. We built the arena for the University of Hawaii, and I was just finishing that job up and I went to a company meeting. I fully expected to go back to Hawaii. We were doing a design and build for the Convention Center, which we ultimately didn't get the project, but anyway. So at the company meeting, he came to me and asked me to go to Greenville, South Carolina, as a consultant and schedule or get the contractor on board.

That was a little touchy, also, because I was the enemy then, because I was trying to pick their job apart, but that was really not the case. It just needed to be organized. I just sat down with them and with their subcontractors and scheduled. Their subcontractors were actually running the job. You can't have your subcontractors run a job. You've got to run it. So I sat down with the contractor and his subs, and we came up with a way to build this building on schedule, and then we made sure to hold the feet to the fire to make sure that once they'd agreed to the schedule and a grand opening for Thanksgiving, then it's just a matter of following up. They were letting their subs get away with things they shouldn't have, and basically that was it.

Adamson: You said that you estimated and built the Resort at Squaw Peak. In reading the article that was in the company newsletter about that project, one of the things that stood out was the location of the project.³ I'm wondering if there were any particular challenges in estimating it and building that complex because of its location.

Liddiard: Yes, basically there was. That's another project that Pankow got, and that was a Perini project originally. Perini did the whole project, but their Construction Division couldn't build the tower and the building for a price that they had in the job, so Pankow put that job together under design and build to do it for the dollars the owner had.

It was quite unique because we had to build it up there at the ski resort. We had the time restraint of when we could start construction, and then we had to deal with the winter, in the winter, to open that project at the time they wanted to do. So that was a good project because I was there during the estimating and I scheduled the job. I knew that job like the back of my hand by the time the project started. I had the thing built in my head before we even started it.

But the restraint we had is we couldn't start till May 15, and we couldn't break ground because of the erosion problems that the TRPA imposes on that part of the country.

Adamson: TRPA being?

Liddiard: Truckee—

³ "Project of the Quarter: Resort at Squaw Peak," *CP News* 9 (Fall 1990).

Adamson: Regional Planning?

Liddiard: No. Anyway, not the TRPA. I've got a brain fart here. But anyway, it's an organization that keeps you from doing any construction during the rainy period, snowy period, any of that time so that you don't put any erosion in the creeks and stuff like that. It's not the TRPA, but I'll think of it here.⁴

But anyway, we couldn't break ground until May 15, and when we broke ground, we had to hit the ground running. We had to have all that stuff done, all the excavation and all the concrete poured and the structure going, because after October, we couldn't do any more excavation, any more of that stuff.

That was a unique project, because we had what we called tunnel forms, so we had to pour that project in the cold weather, and we had to tent the whole thing. We had to heat the whole project with propane. We were told that we could never work through the winter by all the other contractors up there, but we worked all winter. We got the project done, and we finished the project and opened it up for the owner the following Thanksgiving for the ski season.

Adamson: In a situation like that, does the owner have Pankow in his Rolodex and give him a call? How does Pankow come into a project like that where they're not originally involved?

Liddiard: Well, Rik Kunnath, head of the San Francisco office at that time, and I think he still is—no, I guess he works out of L.A. now. But, anyway, he was approached by

⁴ The likely agency is the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency.

somebody from the Perini organization to see if they could do that project for the money that was in that project. So I think it's personal relationship and reputation, but personal between Rik Kunnath and one of the people involved in that project. So I think that's how that came about.

Adamson: I haven't asked you about all of the projects that you listed for me, but this question is sort of a catchall. Are there any job site stories from any of the projects we haven't talked about that illustrate Pankow's innovation or design/build approach that you want to mention?

Liddiard: Well, basically every project that I was involved in, the same attitude was on every project, that there's nothing that we couldn't do no matter how small the job site was, that we could figure out a way to precast, or if could not precast on site, we figured out a way that we could precast our concrete and ship it in and erect it and get it done as scheduled.

Now, the 2101 Webster Street building was quite unique, because we had to build it right next to an existing old structure. This is a good story about Charlie, because when I started that project, we started excavation, and all the money was not in place at that time. So we got the hole cleaned out and we got our trailer on site. We didn't have the financing in place, and so we were going to have to stop the project and wait for the money to come. So I said, "Well, there's some things I want to do so when we do get the money in place, I'll be ready to go. Blow and go."

"How much do you need to finish?"

So I gave him an estimate of what it cost to do the things I wanted to do, so somehow we came up with the money to do that so that when the financing came through, then we were ready to go. We were kind of not much to do onsite there for a while.

Charlie Pankow come by, and there's this big building standing up there, the foundation to this building. Charlie came to me, he says, "You know, Mike, that guy that owns that building next door, he's not a very honest man. He may want to come back after us for any cracks in his building while we're driving piles, stuff like that." So he suggested, said, "I suggest you take good notes of what that building looks like so that when we get the piles all driven, he doesn't try to come back for us to fix a bunch of stuff in his building."

So basically hired an engineering firm, and that's what they did, they did a diagram of every crack in the wall and all the way up, and we drove all the piles, and that way, that little bit of money we spent through Charlie's suggestion on the blueprint of that existing building, I'm sure saved us a lot of money.

Adamson: That's a good story. Do you have a favorite Pankow building?

Liddiard: Well, you know, every one that I worked on is my favorite, but I think the most challenging for me was my first superintendent's job where I didn't have the people to help me. Then the Landmark project was the biggest job and the toughest to do for the money because the people you had to work with over there, they have kind of a lackadaisical attitude. All the workers on the job, that if it's surf's up, they want to go

surfing. We had to have bigger crews on our project at all times than we really needed on the mainland, because they may or may not show up to work on a Monday morning. So that was a tough situation there. But looking back on all the projects, I guess I've got to say my favorite job was the Landmark project just because of its complexity and the challenges that really were there.

Also that job in Hawaii with the arena, where we designed that job and did it for the University of Hawaii was a smaller project time-wise, but it was very satisfying to see the design of that building come together. We precast everything on site and did it for the money that the University of Hawaii had. University of Hawaii was not used to doing the design/build, so that was pretty satisfying.

Adamson: How do you think your career reflects what Charlie Pankow and Pankow Builders, the company, were all about?

Liddiard: Basically I fit right in with the company because I like to work, I like challenges, and I've also got kind of a spirit that I want to see what's over the next rise, so moving around the country was never a big problem for me. It created a little problem for my family, but I started psyching them up six or eight months before I had to go on the next job so that they were ready to move. I kept telling them all the good points.

But basically it was a good organization to work for because they appreciated your hard work and you got compensated well for your work and you got to do the job the way you wanted it done and not the way somebody thought you ought to do the job.

Adamson: Well, going back to what Alan Murk had said, the quote that I had, and basically my understanding from most or all the people I've interviewed is that you could go as far as you wanted to in the company. I guess maybe this applies a little bit more to the engineers who expect some sort of career path, but in reference to Alan Murk, he became operations manager. Was it ever the case that you were asked or wanted to do something like that?

Liddiard: Well, basically, yes, I think so. I've been asked if I wanted the operations manager's job, basically, probably just before I retired, and I thought about it. You know, I would have done just about anything that Charlie Pankow asked me to do. And basically I enjoyed the role as a superintendent. It was right up my alley, but I would have taken the operations manager's job if Charlie himself had asked me to do it, yes.

Adamson: Alan Murk mentored you. Is there anyone in particular, any star pupils that are in the organization you mentored in the course of your career?

Liddiard: Oh, yeah. Yeah, a lot of the guys that are presidents and vice presidents of the company. Dick Walterhouse is an engineer that worked for me, and he worked for me. His first project was with me, and that was the Hayward parking structure, and then he worked for me as an engineer on the Kaiser parking structure in Oakland, and then he worked for me as an engineer on 2101 Webster Street job. In fact, he took that job over and finished it when I went to do the YMCA project.

Dean Browning worked for me as an engineer at the Kaiser parking structure in Walnut Creek. Jeff Doke worked for me as an engineer on Marathon Plaza and on the Resort at Squaw Creek. He was an engineer for me there, too. I'm trying to think who else is still in the company.

That's a good thing about the Pankow organization. They hired the top-quality people out of the engineering schools, and a lot of them out of Purdue. Now, they all weren't as good as their credentials, but the ones that stayed with the company were. I think that's what made the company so successful is those guys graduated with a degree out of college and then they had to go on a job site and work as a field engineer to work their way up. It's not like they put them in a high position right off the bat. I think that's what's wrong with most of the other construction companies, they're really not builders; they're managers. They hire an engineer out of Purdue or some college. He doesn't know a thing about construction. Very qualified guy when it comes to engineering, but then they put him on a job running a bunch of subcontractors, and they just do what they want because he doesn't know how it's supposed to be done.

I think that's the difference between the Pankow organization and the regular company. They'll hire an engineer, put him on a job, and he really doesn't know which way's up. Come to building, it's really hard. And subcontractors actually run the job, and that's really basically the difference. An organization like Pankow and a bigger organization or another organization does basically the same, but they don't do any of their own direct work. We did a lot of our own direct work in those days.

Adamson: We've talked about learning on the job. How much of what you learned about design/build and construction methods did you learn more formally, either through annual meetings or training that was not on the job site?

Liddiard: Well, basically, our annual meetings were very informative because everybody would get up and talk about their project and the problems they had and how they worked them out, which helped you if you hadn't been in that position before. But I think basically the majority of my knowledge came from on the job. One thing about it is, is you learn a lot about it from your mistakes, and if you never made a mistake, you're not doing anything. So that's the nice thing about construction, is when you do make a mistake, you can change it. I'm not talking about a mistake in the structure. I'm talking about a mistake in the way you figure you thought you were going to do it, and you can change your method right in midstream to do it a better way. So you can think on your feet when you're a superintendent of a job and you see, "Well, things are not going right. I think they should go this." So you have a chance to think on your feet and do things different ways.

Adamson: I assume you made at least one presentation at the annual meeting.

Liddiard: Oh, yeah. It's not my forte, but I made lots of presentations. You had to talk about your own project just about every meeting, and I'd given some talks about running field people, how to manage your field people, and a few talks on safety.

Adamson: I know Red Metcalf was part of this, and Dick Walterhouse took me through this culture video that they use as training. It was made about a year before Charlie Pankow died, and in it's the only time I've actually seen Charlie on video talking about the company. So I'm going to run a couple of the quotes that he had in there by you, just for your comment. One of the things that Charlie Pankow said was, "Innovation is our main theme." So can you talk about the company's dedication to innovation and efficiency in building?

Liddiard: Well, basically that's what the company's all about, is innovation. Probably the majority of the projects would have not been able to come about because of cost restraints if the company didn't have innovative ways of putting these projects together to do the project for what the owner—his cost, the money he had to do the job. As long as the owner understands that if you can design it to build it your way of building, the Pankow way of building it, yes, we can build it for those dollars, as long as we're not constrained to a method of construction that costs more money than it should.

Adamson: In that same video, Charlie Pankow also said, quote, "We don't rest on our laurels. If you're good, you'll find solutions."

Liddiard: That's absolutely true. No matter what we've done before, if, in fact—

[interruption]

Adamson: As we were saying, if you're good, you'll find solutions. I was just wondering if you have a particular Pankow experience than you can use to illustrate that.

Liddiard: Well, let's see. It seems like that's what we do on every project. Just like I mentioned the Squaw Creek project. If we hadn't been able to build it for the money that the owner had, we couldn't have done it. The same way with the Landmark project. If we hadn't have come up with a way of using our design and build to do those projects, we wouldn't have been able to do them. So basically I think most of the projects I was involved with were "We got a building to build here, but this is how much money we got to do it. So can you do it for that?" Early on, which I wasn't involved in, I understand that they even said, "We'll build you this building for this much money," on the back of a napkin in a restaurant, and then we went from there and designed the building so that we could build it for that dollars.

Adamson: In that video, Tom Verdi talked about a culture of respect. I'm wondering if you could use a job site example of the culture of respect, not only for other people within Pankow but especially people you deal with, whether it's architects or structural engineers or labor people, laborers, how that applies.

Liddiard: Well, basically the Pankow organization was always respected by the owner, because Pankow would finish up the project on time. The subcontractors always respected the Pankow organization because we paid the subcontractors when they did the job. We didn't hold their money up. So, actually, we were always respected by the

unions because we had such a good safety record, and most people in the construction industry liked to get things done as you say they're going to get done. When they go to give Pankow a price for a job, they know that it's not going to drag on for an extra year. They know the job's going to be done in that amount of time, and they know they're going to get paid when they get each portion of the project done. So subcontractors and also the architects are appreciative of the organization's knowledge of how things go together, and so the architects and engineers are very respectful of the organization, too.

Adamson: You talked about first meeting Charlie Pankow and subsequently Charlie visiting job sites. Are there any other anecdotes that you have about Charlie that illustrate the kind of person he was?

Liddiard: Well, Charlie was very good to me, because my first wife had multiple sclerosis. My medical bills were horrendous, and the insurance company wanted to cancel me because my wife had multiple sclerosis. Charlie found another insurance company that insured me alone, and he paid for that. The company paid for that to cover my medical bills. It was a different [insurance] company than the rest of the employees had, and he was very good to me that way. He appreciated the moving around I did, and he was really good for me and my family.

Adamson: Last question I have is: What is the best way of understanding Charlie Pankow's and, by extension, his firm's contributions to the building industry?

Liddiard: Well, I think he set a very high standard, because I think he's brought respect to the same design and build because they were able to design a building and get it done on time, and in a method that's very structurally sound. Another thing is, he guaranteed his work. In all the time that I worked for Pankow, we never had a lawsuit at any time, somebody tried to sue us because we did a poor job or we didn't do our obligation, and I don't think the company still has any lawsuits.

One experience, when I was working out of the Altadena office and helping with the estimating and doing the other projects, Charlie sent me back to Louisville, Kentucky, to look at a job that we'd built twelve or fourteen years before that had some water leaks. So I rented a scaffold and dropped the building and found out where the water was leaking and found that some of the caulking by the caulking contractor was not thick enough and it had deteriorated. I called him and told him about it, and he said, "Well, what do you think it will cost to fix it?"

So I did an estimate, told him how I thought we'd tear the inferior places out and caulk it, and it was quite a bit of money. We had to guarantee it for ten years, but this was twelve or fourteen years. He just said, "Just go ahead and do it." So we caulked that building and made it waterproof after all those years. That's a pretty good reputation we had.

Adamson: I thank you for your time.

Liddiard: You're welcome.

Adamson: I guess we'll end there.

[End of interview]