

Oral History Interview

with

KEVIN SMITH

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By Michael R. Adamson

Adamson: You're one of the many Purdue graduates hired by Pankow.

Smith: Yes.

Adamson: First, tell me about what makes the Purdue programs in civil engineering and construction management so strong.

Smith: Well, you know, when I was there, we really didn't have a separate Construction Management Division; it was a part of civil engineering, and I think it was just an overall engineering education. Personally, for me, my major was actual structural engineering, and I only got into the construction side because I was on a co-op program where you work a semester and go to school a semester. Maybe that was part of it, too, as far as its strength in that we actually got some founding in the craft itself, if you will. And I actually worked for a cooling tower builder and cooling tower contractor, and so maybe that was kind of part of it, is that you had some practical experience in the field as well, so you kind of knew that it was what you wanted to do before you got started into it. So I

think that's probably part of it. But, I mean, it's just a good basic engineering school, and you get the grounding and the mathematics and the statics and dynamics and those things that play a part in what you do when you get out. So I think that's probably it.

Adamson: Is that why you chose Purdue?

Smith: Yeah. I thought I wanted to go into engineering. I was pretty good at math and science both in high school, and so I said, "Well, that's going to be some kind of engineering maybe, and so I'll pick an engineering school." I didn't know if it was going to be civil or what at the time. My freshman year, I was pretty good in chemistry, too. I actually thought about chemical engineering for a while, but overall, I don't know, I just felt like actually structural engineering would be something more that I would like, and so I ended up focusing on that.

Adamson: And how did you end up at Pankow?

Smith: I was interviewed back there by Charles Pankow Builders, and Dean Stephan, in particular, was the president or vice president at the time, and he came back to campus to do the interviews. I actually got a recommendation on them from Professor [Martin] Gutzwiller, who was my advanced concrete design professor, and he mentioned two names of companies that were coming out to interview and said, "These are a couple companies you guys might want to consider."

So I looked into it and signed up for the interview, and when it came around to the interview, I think I was early, and Dean didn't have somebody right before my appointment time, they had cancelled or maybe he didn't have one, and so we spent probably twenty-five minutes just talking about random stuff, mainly I think canoeing we talked about, before we even got into the interview.

But I felt like through the interview process, we actually exchanged quite a bit back and forth in the interview process, and then they flew me out to California for a second interview with some people, and that's actually when I met Charlie, was when I came out for that first interview. But I was really impressed with the people that they had, and I felt like I would learn a lot as fast as I could, not on a pre-programmed schedule like Chicago Bridge and Iron where you felt like, "Okay, we're going to have you here six months. We're going to have you do this for a year and then have you do this for a year, and then you're going to do this other thing for another six months and then we'll have you where you can start your work." I felt like here it would be—and I was right—take on as much as you could as fast as you could and away you go. So that's why.

Adamson: And what year was this that you—

Smith: I graduated in '78.

Adamson: And who else joined Pankow at this time?

Smith: I believe Steve Kennedy was the other Purdue—I know he was the other Purdue hire, and I don't think there was anybody else that year, at least that I know of. It was Steve Kennedy and myself, and Steve went over to Hawaii, and I stayed here on the mainland, by partially my choice. I mean, I don't remember they gave me a choice, but I didn't really want to go to Hawaii. I felt that I'd be a prime candidate for that rock fever where you could only drive in a circle, and I kind of like to jump in the pickup and go at least a couple hundred miles in one direction before I have to turn around. So I felt like it'd be a good fit to stay here, so, anyway.

Adamson: What were your first impressions of Charlie Pankow when you met him?

Smith: Let's see. That's a good question. I think actually a businessman, but definitely involved in the inner workings and hidden mechanisms of the company. He was interested in how we tracked at my previous company. He asked how we had tracked our man-hours or our labor, and I kind of explained it was more of a man-hour cost. And we discussed the fact that you really need to track dollars per labor unit or per unit because you want to do comparisons between dollars and not just time. So it was a businessman, but intimately involved in the business, I think, was my impression. It wasn't a very long interview. I spent most of my time with Ralph Tice, who was his right-hand guy at the time in the field, and it was a good time. So that was my impression.

Adamson: I don't know if you mentioned this when I had the recorder on, but your first company was?

Smith: Oh, I didn't mention it. It was Ecodyne Cooling Products, but I mean, that was when I was in college. I was on a co-op program with them where you work a semester and go to school a semester except for your freshman and senior years. You're supposed to go straight through those two years. So it was a cooling tower builder, Ecodyne.

Adamson: These next questions are more broad-brush, and we'll come back chronologically in a minute, but just a couple questions. What do you think the impact of hiring all these Purdue grads has had on the company's culture?

Smith. Good question. I think it's made it a conservative company, as maybe most Midwesterners are, perhaps. I think it's grounded in the science of the craft, not just the art, I think maybe even more focused on the mechanics and not the business side so much. So I think that's probably a major effect of what it's had on the company, more interested in solving problems than necessarily making a buck, although that's definitely a part of the deal.

Adamson: Have you been one to go back to Purdue in a professional capacity since you've been graduated?

Smith: No, I haven't. I know a lot of the guys have gone back to do interviews. I haven't done that. I haven't been back. I personally have been back because my family is back there, so Tammy and I stopped through there one time, I think, with the kids just

to kind of revisit old stomping grounds and see what was there. But as far the company or any professional things, I haven't been back to Purdue.

Adamson: If you take the broad sweep of your career, how often did you interact with Charlie Pankow, and what direct impact did he have on your career?

Smith: Well, I would say not a lot as far as a direct involvement, because I was always a couple steps down the totem pole there, but he always came out to the jobs to visit, and he always made a point to talk to the superintendent on the project, which I was on multiple projects. He always left you with the—definitely cared about what it was that we were doing out there and interested in our progress as well as the project's progress. But as guys, you're really just focused on the problem at hand, and as engineers you're kind of focused on the problem at hand. So it was always a good experience, and you always knew that he was backing us up out in the field.

Adamson: When you were interviewing with Dean and others, did you get a sense of where the company had been, where it was going, or was it other things that attracted you as a construction company?

Smith: Well, yes. I'm sure that I was somewhat confident of what they'd done in the past, because I wouldn't have wanted to have gone to work for somebody that was just fresh out of the box, I don't think, and definitely wanted to work for somebody that was knowledgeable in the industry because I wanted to learn the industry. So that was one of

the things that, I think, impressed me the most, is that the guys that were operating the company were always thinking about what it was that they were doing. Well, we don't put somebody out in the yard as a tool guy because we have to pay that guy sixty-grand a year and we're only salvaging ten thousand dollars of tool. So it's not worth it. We just leave them in the bin, and when we go to start a project, we'll sort through them or we'll sort through them as we go. We don't have to post a guy out there to do that. Just simple things like that, that made me think that they were paying attention to business.

Adamson: If I can make a broad statement, guys like you and Bill Bramschreiber seemed to have found a niche as project superintendents. Is that something that you just became comfortable with, or do you like being in the field, or how did that develop?

Smith: Yes, I think that's it. We liked being in the field. Being in the office is kind of a strain, I think, in a way. I mean, you're focused on—I don't know. In the field, at least, at the end of the day you can go out and see one brick stacked on top of another, you know, so it's a little more satisfying, I guess, than just working in the office. I had a short stint as kind of the acting operations manager, but before I took that position, I said, "Look, I want to be able to go back to being a superintendent if that's what works out for us," and that's what worked out for us.

Adamson: Is Pankow structured in such a way that whatever you decide, whether you want to stay in the field or become an offsite manager, as they say, it's structured that way? Or how does career development sort of happen for especially the professional

engineers who come out? How's that presented upfront, and how does that get supported as you go along?

Smith: I think people and the company naturally gravitates people to where they end up wanting to be. I think it's a part of our philosophy that what's ever best for the individual is what's best for the company overall. I mean, we get the most out of the person and that person gets the most out of us if that's where they are, so I think it's kind of a shared goal thing that people get to, not always, but people get to go to what they aspire to do. I think it says a lot for the company. Maybe people grow out of the company, and that's always been the case, and we've always recognized that we can't be all things to all people. So I think that that's recognized and that if somebody needs to move on, then we support that, I think. So I think that's kind of who we are, what's best for the individual.

Adamson: So you join Pankow, and basically in your first few years, who's mentoring you in the field?

Smith: Well, let's see. My first few years actually were Mike Liddiard, who was a project superintendent. He was a guy that came up from the trades, a carpenter, carpenter foreman, superintendent. I started on a job at USC [University of Southern California], actually, adding on to a parking structure that the company had built, Mike hadn't built it, but the company had built a few years before. It was built with the intention of adding on to it at some point.

In the meantime, the seismic codes had changed, so it became a little more difficult to add to the structure. We had to add to the foundations as well, some lateral support grade beams that had to get added to the building and actually had to collar some of the caissons. So it was a little bit challenging in that we were going back underground into an existing building and trying to keep it operating while we were building overhead, which we were able to do, and not too many bad incidents.

I'm sorry. Did I focus on the question here, Mike, or not?

So, Mike Liddiard, I was with him on that project and then actually went to a different project for about six months and then back with Mike for another year or so. I think my first couple of years were mainly mentoring under Mike Liddiard and initially Tom Rouhier as well.

Adamson: Tom?

Smith: Tom Rouhier. He was also, kind of like Mike, a field superintendent, started out as a carpenter foreman for the company, was actually a superintendent for us, I think twice. He actually left the company and then came back and was a superintendent for us. I started with both of those guys, and then I actually worked with Tom on another project in Long Beach later on.

So I'd say those first two guys in my first few years were the mentors to me. They came at it from a different angle. I was the engineer type. They were the carpenter foreman types. So I think you kind of naturally blend together better when you have that different background. So we kind of counterbalanced each other a little bit.

Adamson: I'm going to ask you about some of your specific projects. This profile in the company newsletter, one of the things that's stated up-front was that you love tackling the challenges of the structural concrete portions of the projects.¹ Can you elaborate on that, just generally?

Smith: Yes, sure. I think I like the form, the formwork. It requires some engineering, typically. There's a lot of different ways to do it and not all are suited for every application, and so coming up with a different means and method that actually suits the product at hand, I think is part of the fun, part of the challenge of doing it. So, yes, I feel like I do gravitate to that side of the work. It's interesting. It's not cookbook, like structural steel where there's so many pieces that come off of the mill. The design can always be varied, very varied, instead of just sort of varied like structural steel. In the end, you're still hoisting beams and scattering out metal deck, whereas with formwork you could be pouring on a deck or you could be pouring on a precast beam or a precast plank, or you could be doing all sorts of things. So it's quite a lot more variables and a little more challenge to come up with the best method to get something done.

Adamson: At what level is the whole idea of the design/build approach of a material impact on how you do your job?

Smith: Well, I mean, first of all, if it's to be designed in concrete, which is really where a lot of our company expertise is, anybody can build a steel building, go out and hire a steel

¹ "Employee in Focus: Kevin Smith," *CP News* 9 (Spring 1991).

contractor, and get the cheapest price for the steel and go for it. But on the lower rise or mid-rise buildings, or even high-rise buildings, a concrete application is often what really makes the most sense for the building. You know, you can lower the floor-to-floor heights so that you aren't really wasting a bunch of space, whereas with structural steel the beams are usually deeper.

So I think the fact that design/build allows us to use a more appropriate system for each building. If you just leave it to the designers alone, I think they would tend to gravitate to something that's easier for them, that doesn't cause them a lot of risk or out-of-the-box thinking. At least some of the designers, a lot of the designers, most designers, I would say, are that way. So I think that kind of lends us the added ability to play to our expertise, I guess.

Adamson: This resume that I got from Renate [Kofahl] lists three projects on which you worked as a field engineer, including the USC parking structure that you talked briefly about. What stands out for you among these projects as job site innovations?

Smith: I think adapting a slipform for building use was a good one that we used both at Crocker [Plaza, a 12-story office building in Long Beach], which I guess I was a project engineer on that job, but also we used it in Portland at PFFC [Pacific First Federal Center, a 14-story office building in Portland], which I guess was my third and, I guess, my last field engineer's job. I think that was kind of an innovative use of something that's normally used for a silo or a cooling tower, even, or something, actually using that as a

building method to build a structure and not just a cooling tower or a building. I think that was pretty unique.

I think also not just that job, but also Milwaukee [411 E. Wisconsin, a 30-story office tower with adjacent 700-vehicle parking structure], where we used the precast wall panels as a form. A lot of the jobs actually where we use the exterior of the building as a precast wall panel, and then to use that as a form for the concrete behind it and only form the three sides, or even one side if there's a fin on the precast that's designed into the precast, then that column form becomes very easy because now you're just bolting up a wood panel on one side and away you go. So I thought that was one of the good innovations that we had that allowed us to do it better than the competition, using kind of a dual use of an architectural element, for the architecture but also as a means and methods to get the concrete in its place.

Adamson: For projects, I'm looking at Crocker and 411 East Wisconsin, projects like that, some of the more high-profile projects that Pankow's done. What, from your experience, are the major challenges to getting projects like that done on time and on budget and meeting that sort of criteria?

Smith: Well, having the room, I guess, to build out—I guess I didn't mention the precast beam bed as well, because we used that on the parking structure. I'm kind of going back on you here, Mike, but you'll figure it out.

Adamson: That's right.

Smith: We used that on the parking structure where we actually set it up offsite and cast the beams offsite. Because we were adding on to an existing building, there's really no place to do it on site. And then when we came down to do Crocker, we actually had to set the beam bed up in the footprint of the garage portion of it. There was an office building and parking garage, and so we had to set that up in the footprint of the parking garage, and we basically left the bay out until we could get the whole project cast. So we cast that project in the basically one bay of the parking garage.

So I think that's one of the challenges of getting it built is the way we do it, because we have to sequence the casting, not only in what makes sense for the casting, grouping like beams, but also, well, how are we going to erect it, because you can't just erect all one type of beam all the way up the building. You have to have some of each in most cases. And so you have to set up and do a casting of these and maybe three castings of these typical beams, and then you've got to do a couple of castings of the oddballs that go on a given floor. So I think that's one of the challenges of getting them built physically on the project.

I think one of the challenges is getting a good price for the building, of course. It's a challenge in markets where people are willing to work for almost nothing just for the cash flow. It's a challenge to maintain your financial standards as well, and on occasion it's getting the people. If it's a boom time, you can have the challenge of getting the people or being able to get the right equipment that you really want. The tower crane that would be best for that project might not be available, or you may need to

figure out another way of going about doing it and so on. But that's part of the challenge. But, yes, it's a problem sometimes in the labor market, and strikes are often a problem.

But, unfortunately, most of the time the biggest problem is the owners wanting to change their minds about where they were going with the building or how they wanted something. The old "Oh, shit, you built it just like I told you." [laughs] They didn't really realize what they had or what they were doing, I guess. But, I don't know, it seems like owner changes are probably *the* most difficult thing for us to handle, because we don't like to beat them up on those costs, and yet it's so disruptive to everyone's overall process of being able to walk through the building in an organized fashion. So that's probably the single most difficult thing that we face, is the owner changes and their challenges that they bring to the table.

There's other challenges that they can bring too, not just the changes, but the fact that there's two owners on the same project, and now who are you working for? Are you working for both? And if you're working for both, then who has the right-of-way, if you will? That's a challenge. We've had that difficulty in the past, so maybe we'll get into that when we get to a specific project. But in any case, that's another thing that makes things difficult. The owner's not always in control of everything that you have to challenge you.

Adamson: I've talked to Dean Stephan and [Welton Becket architect] Art Love and Joe Sanders about 411 East Wisconsin. I get the impression that that project, despite the winters, came together as well or better than most in terms of working with the owners, the architects, and the whole team coming together and producing—

Smith: Yes, it really was a good project for us, Mike. We hit Milwaukee at a good time. We hit '83, '84. As you've already said, the economy was a little bit downturned at that point.

Funny story. Tammy and I had finally saved enough money for a down on a house. We went to a realtor in Milwaukee to investigate maybe should we go ahead and buy. "We think we're going to be here for three years."

And the realtor said, "Oh, you're only going to be here for three years? Forget about it." [laughs] And if the realtor's telling you that, because they want to make a sale, but if they're telling you no way are you going to make your money back in three years. At that time, Harnischfeger was having a hard time, a lot of companies.

But it actually worked well for us as a California contractor coming to Milwaukee because there were a lot of good union hands that were looking for work and would love to go to work on a 30-story building where they would have a job for the next year plus. So that was a very beneficial thing that happened to us at that time. The owner had some influence in the city of Milwaukee. Well, the city of Milwaukee generally was, I think, builder-friendly. The owner did the design—oversaw the design—but left us alone to help with that design, and it worked out well. We were able to design into the building the systems that we felt like were going to work for us and for the project. So we were able to use, instead of a slipform core, because a slipform isn't really easily weather-protected, we switched to a jumpform core because that lends itself—the concrete's actually encapsulated in the formwork overnight. Usually, once it's been cast overnight,

then it's safe after that, as long as it's been kept from freezing in that first 500 psi or twenty-four hours, whatever it is. So we were able to incorporate that into the building.

The precast. Again, the precast façade with the formwork on the back, we were able to make that work for us. The precast panels themselves lent it to making it easily adapted to a temporary window so that we could fabricate temporary panels to go in one floor, let's say, of panels, so that we could then heat the space of one floor underneath where we were casting the slab concrete in order to make that next pour on the floor above. In addition to that, the floor plank were precast, so we actually laid floor plank spread with a metal deck, and that allowed us to top that enclosure. So you had a slab poured below you, you had the exterior wall panels with the plastic windows in them, and then the precast plank with blankets over the top on the top to really give it a—we could build the heat up to really whatever we wanted to do inside that space below. You could actually get it too hot. You go down there after being outside, you start cooking.

Anyway, it was a good project for us. It was tall enough that a lot of our repetitive systems could come to their fullest fruition, I guess, and it worked out good all the way around. It was good from the labor side, good from the equipment side. We had a good plan for the equipment. We'd always envisioned a tower crane on the job, and then as it turns out, the owner asked us part of the way through, well, if we needed to speed the job up, what would be the best bang for our buck to speed the project up, and a job usually comes down to hoisting, because at that time concrete pumps weren't really, let's say, as consistent as they are today. They were a little more subject to breakdown than a crane was. So we elected not to use a concrete pump. We bucketed all that concrete.

So the hoisting with the precast and all the precast members, it made sense to—we looked at adding another tower crane, adding a second tower crane, and so we looked at that and said, yes, we could probably speed it up by—I forget how many months we told them we could take off the schedule. I forget the specifics, but I know that we took at least two months out of it, I would think.

In any case, and then as we were getting into it, we realized there were other benefits to having that crane as well. We eliminated a lot of overtime that we would normally have spent on casting columns, because we had two hooks so we could be doing a couple things at the same time. We could be erecting precasts over here and pouring columns over here. So we usually, because it's a small crew, cast columns on overtime, but we didn't have to pay that cost.

Then at the end of the job when it came time to dismantle the cranes, we'd always figured on having to put what they call a derrick, a lay-leg derrick on top of the building in order to dismantle the crane, because with the one-crane scenario that we had, we had the crane in the center of the building so that when you get up to the top, you've kind of got to get it out to the edge now.

So as it turned out on the dismantle, then, we were able to actually use the center crane to add boom to the outside crane, which had a shorter stick because it had to miss the inside crane. We're actually able to add stick, add boom to it, and then climb it over the top of the inside crane and use it to dismantle the outside crane and then climb the outside crane down. So we already had the cost figured in for the acceleration to do the up and the down on the crane, so we saved some money on the dismantle. We saved some money on the labor costs as well overall.

So it was a good job for a lot of reasons. A lot of things just kind of fell into place for us, like I say, that really made it a good job. Interesting job, too, because you didn't only have the building, but we also had a parking garage that as the guys were running the numbers, they said, well, back there in the East, where there's not the seismic concern and the codes are written that way, that these guys that did the precast parking garages, completely precast parking garages, had a really low number to provide the—I think it was a seven-story parking structure just to the—I guess that was the south side of the building. So we had that going on at the same time as kind of a sub to us that it was kind of fun to watch them do what they do as an expert in their field.

Then we had the bank building was a part of the office building, but it was kind of stuck out beyond the footprint of the building, and that was kind of a separate little tilt-up structure that was a part of the overall project and kind of let some of us guys have their own little project to work on. I think Dick Walterhouse was the parking garage king, and I think I helped out with the panels and in the bank building. So, anyway, it was a good project for a lot of us to learn on and to have fun with.

Adamson: Were there any other concessions to winter that you haven't mentioned that you had to make?

Smith: You know, we did great. First of all, it wasn't that rough a winter, as I remember. I do remember we were climbing the Linden—that was the outside tower crane—looking over at the Allis Chalmers clock with the temperature on it, and it was five degrees.

[laughs] I was looking at the ironworker foreman, and he had that—you know, they all

chew, and he had that all in his beard frozen. But it was a nice day. The sun was shining. It was just five degrees, that's all.

But, no, we actually had kind of our own internal rule where if it was 20 degrees and rising, we would go ahead and make a slab pour. We didn't really have to worry too much about the columns or the walls because they were encapsulated as a form, as I previously said. So for the walls and the columns, we didn't have to worry about that because the walls were encapsulated. The columns were a separate form. We did have a little tube that went into the columns that we would measure the temperature on just to make sure that they didn't get below freezing. So that was kind of a check that we did to make sure that nothing happened.

But as far as the concessions, we had to give up some space on the project for a propane tank. We had a huge propane tank, probably about the length of this [conference] room and roughly the same diameter, a little smaller. But it got filled up, and then we ran a pipe up to run the heaters, the heaters for the jump form, the heaters for the decks, the salamanders underneath the decks. So that was a concession we had.

But, as I recall, we didn't lose hardly any days to weather that much. If it was zero, I would not be surprised. If we lost one or two, I could see that. I know we didn't lose any more than that, I don't think. Just maybe by happenstance, maybe because we were prepared and we took it seriously. I think maybe we were a little more concerned about it as a California contractor coming into Milwaukee than maybe the locals were, you know, but I think most of those guys just shut down in the winter or shut down when it's not conducive, and we were able to keep going.²

² For more on this project, see, "Project of the Quarter: 411 East Wisconsin Building," *CPI News* 3 (Winter 1985) and the oral histories of Dean Stephan and Art Love in this series.

Adamson: I think I've asked other people this, but just in general, the difference between what the field engineer would do and the project engineer would do, and then like for 411 East Wisconsin, how many project engineers would there be and how many field engineers would there be?

Smith: Well, typically, the field engineer's tasks are, I don't know, ordering concrete, tracking quantities and detailing, whereas the project engineer's responsibilities are generally more administrative, I would say, in that you are tracking and working with subs maybe more as far as their crafts go or maybe you're actually designing formwork for the various elements. So I would say that's kind of the dividing line. It's not a real hard and fast dividing line, I mean. Most of the project engineers would hand off formwork design to a field engineer when they could and would help out with the quantity tracking or whatever. So I don't think it's really a hard and fast line. But typically a project engineer has a little more, I'd say, administrative responsibility, working with the field superintendents for schedule as far as helping put the schedules up on the board and "guesstimating" times for the different activities and tasks. So, because you have a little more experience at that, you can do that a little better at that level.

This is all to answer the question about the quantity on 411 [East Wisconsin]. As I remember, Joe Sanders was the project engineer architectural. We called it architectural, I think. And I was the project engineer structural. Then for one period of time Dick Walterhouse had the parking garage. So Joe and I were both in the tower, and then Dick was on the parking garage, and that was pretty much the way we rode it out.

Joe actually stayed behind and finished up a lot of the T.I. [tenant improvement] work, and I actually moved over to Capitol Court Mall [also in Milwaukee] and did another project back there for the same owner, a renovation job. So that's kind of how it was set up.

As far as field engineers, we had Joe Laumer, Tom Krajewski, and it seemed like we had somebody else. Joe Laumer, I think, was back there with us for a while. So I think we really had two, and then, part-time, Dick was there, so we had two there the full-time, and with Dick there when the parking garage was going and then only a couple, three field engineers.

Adamson: Before we move on chronologically, I wonder if you can tell me more or talk a bit more about Ralph Tice. Brad Inman said that he was the only guy that he knew who could build a whole building by himself if you gave him enough time. [laughter]

Smith: Yeah, I've got to go along with Brad on that one. Ralph was quite the guy, he really was. He was a carpenter foreman and came up through the ranks, was the operations manager when I was first hired in. I would say he was probably one of the major reasons that I came to work for Pankow, was just my interview with him and the fact that you could tell it was a well-run, well-thought-out, no-nonsense kind of organization, that, again, you would get to take on what you could when you could.

He was quite the iconic builder as in—I don't know. I've heard some stories about Ralph. When we build some of our precast panels, a lot of time they will use actually a concrete mold, so they'll actually cast a negative, I guess it is, of what you

want, and then they would use that as the form for actually casting the product, the positive. So I guess he was on a job where they were building a project that had the precast panels in it. This was later on in the project, after it was built and they were finishing the project out, and I guess a couple guys came into the office from the window contractor, and they said, “Hey, we’re going to have to make a separate window for each of these, because they’re all off. They’re all different dimensions.” He physically grabbed the two guys by their collars and threw them out of the office trailer, because he knew they were lying to him because they all came off of the same panel, so there’s no way there was a difference in dimensions. [laughs]

But that’s just a small slice of Ralph. He was really a practical guy, but a no-nonsense guy and always looking to get it done better and always made sure that people took responsibility for their actions. He was a classic. I only was with the company a short amount of time before he had his heart attack and then left the company, but I sure enjoyed working with him and all of us guys in the field did, too. Mike Liddiard and Tom Rouhier, they all really respected Ralph. I think Bob Law, anybody really respected Ralph for the fact that he came up through the ranks and was a very wise and knowledgeable guy in the field.

He knew his limitations as well, you know. I remember him—I was just a punk engineer on the job, but I had my structural engineering background from Purdue. We were talking about adding some shoring on the top level of the parking garage. Again, we have the tower crane back inside the building, and so the plan on this job was to—I mean, it worked fine. There was no issue at all. But the plan on this job was to set a small crane up on the roof of the parking garage and actually drive it across the parking

deck to the interior to the parking garage, where we would place shores down through the parking garage to handle the extra load of the outriggers and then dismantle the crane, the heavy parts of the crane with that little crane from the inside, handing them off to bigger crane on the outside. And Ralph came in and said, “Well, you know, don’t worry about it, Kevin.” So what we were talking about was the added slab shoring that we would want to place. Instead of pouring a slab, stripping it, and then putting additional shoring back, which is normally how you would do something like this, he said, “Let’s just leave our shoring in place, but let’s beef that shoring up so that we don’t have to worry about the time that it takes for the concrete to come up or to strip it and put it back up. We can go ahead and get the crane down right away after the last pour.”

I said, “Great. Not a problem.”

So I was getting ready to design the formwork, and he said, “Kevin, just design it for a simple span.”

I said, “Well, Ralph, I can’t do that, because if we are traveling across the deck, the possibility exists that we actually might be loading one of these members more than WL-squared-over-8. It could actually be higher than that.”

Whether I was wrong on that or not, he backed off right away, because I said, “What I have to do is I have to draw an influence diagram.” Whether I really needed to do that or not, I don’t remember at this point. Right? But at least I threw it out there and made it sound like I knew what I was talking about. [laughs]

But he respected the people that knew their area or knew their craft, and that was the main thing, that he allowed people to do their job that could do their job, and if you couldn’t do your job, you were in trouble. So, a great guy.

Adamson: What year did he leave?

Smith: I don't remember. It must have been in '79 or '80, because Bob Carlson became the operations manager, and Bob visited us up in Milwaukee, I think. I know he was the operations manager when I came back down. Let's see. Daniel was born in 1980, so when I came back down in '81, I'm pretty sure that Ralph was already retired, and Bob Carlson was the new operations manager at that time.

Adamson: So if I have this right, when you stuck around for Capitol Court, this is your first job as a superintendent?

Smith: You have it exactly right, yes, that was my first job as a project superintendent. That's correct. It's an interesting job, because we were taking—you probably remember some of this, Mike. Well, no, maybe not, because you were a kid at the time.

Adamson: Well, I know the mall.

Smith: What happened was, I think Macy's bought Gimbels at that time, and so there's that whole fair trades practices or whatever, anti-competition, whatever that rule is now.

Adamson: Antitrust.

Smith: Antitrust laws, right. So the rule was that Macy's had to divest themselves of certain amounts of square footage, and so they had to sell the Gimbels store. Anyway, they were doing this whole renovation. Bottom line is there was a pot of money that was available to do the conversion of this building from—it was a huge building. I want to say it was actually a 90,000-square-foot footprint over three or four stories, and the plan was to convert the middle level. It was ground level on one side, it was above grade on the other side, so the one above the basement level, if you will, was going to become a Target store. That was the deal that was struck, and so there was this pot of money that the developer had available because they had to get out of their lease to adapt this building to other uses.

So what had to be done is they wanted to raise the parking lot the full story, so they're bringing in enough dirt to bring the parking lot from coming in on the lowest level to coming in on the second level, which required a retaining wall all the way across the one side of the building that was a couple hundred feet long, and then it required separate stair towers, because now the tenant that's on the middle floor doesn't want tenants from above or tenants from below passing through their space. So they couldn't use the stairwells that were inside the building. So they had to add masonry block, is how they were ended up designed, stair towers on either end. So there's these stair towers that had to get built with elevators as well.

This retaining wall that retained—I don't know how many yards of earth we had to bring in for the parking garage. The escalators had to come out, because they didn't want transfer from floor to floor. They had to get moved out into the mall, so the

elevators had to come down and kind of go into storage until openings could be cut out in the mall, and you had to work out inside the mall itself to put the escalators up out there.

Then the other significant structural element was there was a ten- or eleven-foot-deep concrete girder that spanned seventy feet and it supported a mezzanine level. The new use of the space required that instead of having that seventy-foot span, they were okay with columns at twenty foot or thirty foot on center, but they couldn't stand that beam height and all of that area taken out of their ceiling because they wanted a thirteen-foot-high ceiling to go all the way to the wall. So we had to shore the entire building in order to take out this one girder. So it was kind of a unique thing for a guy to start out taking on, but it was a concrete challenge, and it was a good project. So that was my first job as a superintendent, though.

Adamson: I forget who first said this, but I've subsequently asked all the superintendents, including Alan Murk, about Charlie's belief that the superintendent was the most critical role in the project.

Smith: Yes.

Adamson: And they wanted supervisors to know everything about the job, and so on and so forth. Just taking your experience as a superintendent, if you can talk about that, the role of the superintendent in the company.

Smith: And that is absolutely true. Charlie always felt like the superintendents were the key to the company, the glue to the company, where the rubber hits the road kind of guys, and he always supported this. He always would come out and ask the pointed questions to kind of make sure. I think it was really just to put us unease. [laughs] I know a lot of guys would actually study the day before they knew Charlie came, because they always knew that he'd want to know about the cost of this and the cost of that.

But eventually, over the years I resigned myself to the fact that he was going to ask me a question I was not going to know the answer to, so I might as well just tell him, you know, instead of studying all night the night before. Just worry about what I knew, hopefully that will be enough, and if I don't know a particular answer, I'll say, "Charlie, I don't know. I'll have to get back to you." [laughs]

I think it's something that we probably miss some of in the few short years that we've been without him is that we don't have that personality in the background coming out and quizzing us on stuff, and also knowing there's somebody there that gives a shit. So we're still a great company, don't get me wrong. I don't feel like we've changed all that much, but just that persona of the guy that is overall in charge coming out and coming to you one-on-one is something that we'll probably pick up. We'll probably pick it up.

Adamson: One of the projects you were superintendent on was 2101 Webster, and that project was a Pankow Development, or Charlie and Russ project.

Smith: It was.

Adamson: Talk about being superintendent on a project where Charlie was the owner/developer.

Smith: Actually, Mike, it really wasn't that bad for me, because at the point that I got there, the structure was up, and we were doing T.I. work. But it was interesting because of the deals that get done and who pays for what. But at that point in time—it's funny I should even remember this. It's when fax machines first came in, because I remember one of the contracts going back and forth, and they said, "Well, we can just fax it."

"You can what? We can what?"

"We can fax it. We can fax it to the office upstairs."

"You mean the business office upstairs, the leasing office? They've got a fax machine? What's that?"

It was fine. But it was really not a big deal for me, Mike. I mean, we worked with the tenant and their architect, and the deal was already done, and there were leases already in place then by the time I got there, because I was coming back from Milwaukee. I actually came back from Milwaukee to go to that building, and I remember reading the leases on the plane, because there may have been something in the lease that I needed to know as a superintendent on the project.

So I remember Brad Inman actually giving me the leases, copies of the leases, to read, and I remember reading those on the plane on the way out to kind of check on what we might owe somebody as far as their deal, whereas I don't think normally the lease

would have been shared with the project superintendent from any other developer, but because we were the developer—anyway, so it was interesting.

Adamson: This Capitol Court Mall project, did that in any way establish you as a mall expert for subsequent jobs?

Smith: No, because, really, I didn't have to do hardly any more mall jobs, Mike. I mean, I've been involved with them. Capitol Court, when I subsequently went to like the Brea Mall, I was on the parking garages, and so it was really kind of a, believe it or not, independent little entity. I mean, we had to tie into the Nordstrom store. We had to connect to two sides, so we had a bridge across the road that landed on their building and so there was some coordination there with the mall, with that developer or that contractor, actually. Then we had to bring in a slab from the top deck of our parking garage to their upper level and their lower level.

But, no, I think that job just showed, I think, that we could make money at something that was kind of oddball for us, oddball for anybody, and we were able to pull it off. There were things that were lucky and things that were unlucky, and we overall came out pretty good on it, so that was just a good job to have been on, I think. Smaller job for Pankow, you know, for me to learn on, so it was good.

Adamson: We're not going to go through every project, but on a couple of these that stand out—

Smith: You said “out.” Now I know you’re from Milwaukee. [laughter]

Adamson: The northern hemisphere.

Smith: Yes.

Adamson: One of the lines on your résumé is overseeing precast operations on Gateway Plaza.

Smith: Yes, that was actually a lot of fun and it actually gave me an opportunity to—I didn’t have any overall responsibility on the project, and so it wasn’t as, I don’t know, stressful, maybe, as some of the other jobs on either side of it, and it actually gave me some time to spend. Actually, when I was there, I was assistant coach for a Pop Warner football team, so I actually was able to scoot out of there a couple nights a week early, so it was good.

But it was a fun deal, again, because we were setting up precast beds for different members. We had some of the roadway members that were very deep and a little technical challenging, I guess, so we set up a separate bed for those. We called it the bus plaza yard. Then we had the normal precast set up alongside the railroad track, but where the railroad tracks were, that became our casting area. And then there was really just the coordination of where we’re casting, what pieces, and what those pieces were, and kind of overseeing the detailing, the rebar, and the cranes for each operation and et cetera.

So it was another good challenge because there were a lot of pieces of precast on that job, and getting them cast in a sequence that we could stack them and not have to move them too damn many times or reshuffle through the stack. With the things that are changing on the job site, water over here or other issues, and you plan to do it this way and, “Oh, shoot, now we can’t do it that way. What are we going to do now? We’ve got to rework our sequence.” So it was a challenging job.

It was Bill Tornrose and Joe Sanders had more of the responsibility on that job. Bill Tornrose was the superintendent and Joe was the sponsor, and so they were the ones that were more awake at night worrying about it, and I had a kind of a smaller role on that job than having the overall responsibility. So it was interesting, it was very technically challenging, and it was a good time. It was a challenge. It was a problem to solve, and we solved it, so it was good.

Adamson: I forget who mentioned this, but with this establishment of the MidState Precast, that now Pankow people directly do less of that pre-, self-performed work, concrete work.

Smith: Right.

Adamson: I’ll just ask you to comment on that and whether that changes the sort of experiences people have at Pankow in the field, if the concrete’s being produced—

Smith: Offsite?

Adamson: —offsite.

Smith: I would say to a degree. I was kind of one of the ones behind the MidState Precast [start-up], just so you know where I'm kind of coming from. I was a little bit involved with getting the property at the time. We said, "Well, let's take a look at it," because what we were running into was that to set up the beam bed on a job site, it's a challenge for the site and it's a challenge for the superintendent. It seemed like it always caused some anguish, if you will, not just mental, but also the physical on the job. I mean, there's certain things you couldn't do. You had to have the time for that portion of the work. Maybe that delayed that portion of the work. The sprinkler guy's running into you, whatever. So it's not always the panacea, I guess, if you will, to low cost on every job, and so we were running into the fact—at the time we were kind of playing, well, we need so many feet of product in order to make sense to set up the bed, otherwise it's cheaper for us to buy it out from Spancrete.

Adamson: From whom?

Smith: Any precaster, you know, Spancrete or whoever the—I forget the names of some of the other precasters at the time. But we would actually purchase—for a smaller job, it didn't make sense to set up our entire operation when they're already set up in a yard. They could produce those members for us. But we were having to give away some pretty significant jobs.

The Glendale Galleria came to mind, because it was three roughly—let's just say it's three 1,000-car parking garages, and there were different numbers on each phase and et cetera, but it was basically replacing an existing structure, and we could only do it third at a time, and it was a big job. But you couldn't set up the bed because you were moving through the project. In other words, we were tearing down this portion of the structure and then replacing it and putting it back into operation and giving them that to them for Christmas shopping, right, and then tearing this one down and rebuilding it, and then turning that one over to them and then turning this one.

Well, there's no place where you could set up a precast bed, so there's a lot of beams to cast, but no place to do it. So we had to give that job away, let's say to the precaster, to the local precaster. We said, "Well, jeez, if we could come up with a place." At the time the thought was we would just set the bed up at this yard in the middle of the state and then if we have jobs in Southern California, we'd go up there, unmothball the bed, you know, set it up, but just leave it set up, but preserve it, cover it, oil it, whatever we have to do, just leave it set up, and then when we needed to produce precast, we could go up there with a crew and produce the members. You don't have to amortize the cost of that setup and teardown every time. So that was a thought that really—because we had a yard, typically, anyway. We have a main storage yard where we stored stuff in between jobs, and we had one at the time, I think, in Fontana or Irwindale, one of them. I think it was Fontana at that time.

So we said we can take all of our stuff up here to this yard in the middle of the state, we'll set the bed up, and then we'll ship product both ways, and that way we can get into this market, make some more money that way. And it just kind of became a

monster of its own. Once we had it set up, then it was, well, why aren't we using it? Well, we don't have work right now for it. Well, why don't we—I mean, you run into the needing to feed it because you've got people that now you've trained in it, and you want to keep them working, right, and you want to keep that production going.

So, well, we can produce concrete panels for Turner or McCarthy or whoever. Right? All we have to do is subcontract it to them. So it became its own entity, and that's how it got started.

So your real question, though, was do we lose some of our experiences for our people by doing that, and I would say no. If we had a job big enough and if MidState was busy enough, we could go back to precasting on the site, but it needs to lend itself to that. So, I mean, we wouldn't necessarily have to lose it.

The other thing we could do is we could send our people to MidState to train, but, again, I mean, it's not the best, because it's nice having people devoted to this job and to this company, MidState, to this task. So maybe, maybe we are losing some of it. I think there are still plenty of opportunity for the guys, though, with the structural concrete that we do, to pour the concrete, maybe not so much the precast part, other than a big part of the precast is the erection, and, of course, we're still involved with the erection. Maybe not contractually all the time, but still managing that part of the work.

Adamson: So these factors that you just discussed far outweigh things like environmental regulations of onsite precast beds as factors to—incentives to set up a precast bed?

Smith: There were always issues with sandblasting, which sometimes inspectors will require or the product requires sandblasting, and so that is a problem onsite to be able to handle that, whereas in a yard you maybe better control it. As far as environmental factors, I don't remember that playing a big role in that decision, Mike. But looking out on it right now, with the sandblasting rules, if it was architectural—and the other thing is supplying the concrete. They are set up now to basically batch their own concrete, and this is kind of a big deal because the local suppliers that would supply us the concrete on the site really don't want to deal with a precast operation. It's a few yards at a time. It's always a special mix. It's usually got something funny with it that requires more thinking on their part. They have to have even an extra bin for a special rock or a special cement, you know, a high, early-strength cement, or some white rock that looks great on the bottom of the building. So that is an issue with why it's better to do it at the plant, because they have their own batch plants, basically.

Adamson: Gateway Plaza is one of the at least more recent signature buildings, if you will, that Pankow has constructed, and the question I have is, what is the connection between Pankow's design/build approach to a project and the often architecturally impressive structures that result?

Smith: I think they're negative. [laughter] We're always wanting to build a box, Michael, and the architect is always wanting to build something like that right there [points] with the round panels and all that kind of thing, so as far as us doing the design/build, I think it's a benefit to the owner, though, because of the complexity of

them and the aid that they get from the contractor portion of us to build the building and to schedule it and to just make it happen in a time frame that fits their program.

So as far as the appearances of the building, I think if we had our druthers, Michael, we'd just build a concrete box. [laughs] And it's actually the most efficient, right, I mean, as far as space planning. I mean, every time you put a radius on the building, you lose square footage, usable square footage. You put a triangle on it or a funny angle on it, you end up with wasted space. There's no two ways about it. You lose the efficiency of the skin versus the enclosure, because a box is the least amount of—well, unless it's a sphere, maybe. I don't know. But I think a box is still the least amount of skin for the volume enclosed. So if we had our druthers, we'd be building concrete boxes.

So the fact that we do work with specialty granites on the outside of a building is a testament to our, I don't know—I want to say adaptability, but what would that be? Just a willingness to work with somebody, right? A willingness to recognize that somebody else has a good idea as well, that the architects do have a place and that their ideas are beneficial to us all, as far as when the building gets done and how it looks and et cetera. So I think we have enough savvy, if you will, to know that you shouldn't just hire somebody that's going to do the drawing; you need to hire somebody who can think, as far as an architect goes.

Adamson: So if you looked at the earlier buildings that kind of look like concrete boxes till today, the changes are accounted for by architectural taste more than any—

Smith: Probably more than our influence, yes. I would say, I think so, Michael. I might be called to task on that, but I think that the façade on Gateway Center, I think, was something that the MTA [Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transit Authority] had in mind, as far as the material use. I'm pretty sure that we wouldn't have specified a high-end, high-dollar, high-labor-intensive material on the outside of a building if we had a choice in it.

So as far as some of the other projects, I know that like the Montage that I just got off of, we wouldn't have put all the gingerbread on that building that maybe makes it a statement that just being engineers we just wouldn't do that. That's a showy "look at me" kind of thing, and that's not our style. [laughter] Anyway.

Adamson: I lined up both your résumé and Bill Bramschreiber's, and it looks as if you're both superintendents on White Memorial Medical Center, although it looks like you had different parts of the project or they were separate projects?

Smith: We did, yes. Bill had the bigger headache. It's funny, because we were together on Paseo, too, and we were both superintendents on that project, and we both had different parts of the project. I think he had the more difficult one, even though traditionally you would say the residential maybe is more of a challenge.

So back to—which job were we talking about?

Adamson: White Memorial.

Smith: White Memorial, yes. I had the medical office building and parking structure. Although a below-grade parking structure, still a parking structure. The medical office building had one level below grade and a few levels above grade. He had the hospital and all the problems that you have with the OSHPD [Office of Statewide Health Planning and Development] inspections. It's a completely separate—ours was city of L.A., you kind of know the rules, you know, the codes and everything. This is division of the state architect, completely different inspection program, completely different design parameters, construction protocols, completely different. And he had all the headaches. I had all the gravy. [laughter] Thanks, Bill, appreciate it.³

We were pretty separate entities. It's kind of funny, they were behind some other buildings from us. Our trailer was set up over here in front of the hospital where the parking garage is going and the office building is going. They had offices back in some old buildings that the hospital was going to tear down later on, and so they were using those as offices. So we kind of revolved in our own separate worlds. We'd pass men back and forth if we needed to, but that doesn't lend itself to proper planning anyway. I mean, if you need a guy for a day, yeah, maybe, but if you're going to be needing more guys, you don't want to go rob from them. You've got to build up your own crew.

And, really, you need to plan for your tools, so we've got a job to do, they've got a job to do. It was kind of work that we kind of worked in our own different worlds on it. We still work for the same owner and there were certain interfaces, of course, we had, but it worked out well for me. I know it was a big headache for Bill, but he had a lot more of a challenge. He'd already done a hospital at that point, too, so he was definitely more

³ For more on the White Memorial Medical project, see, Amy Eagle, "A Seismic Shift: State Regulation Prompts Major New Project at Los Angeles Hospital," *Health Facilities Management* 20 (February 2007).

qualified to do that part of it. He had been on the Arcadia Methodist Hospital before that job. I believe it was before that job. Sure, before that job, yeah. So he brought that experience to the table for that part of the project. And I'd been working on the parking garage in Glendale, so it worked out for me.

Adamson: Talk about, as you mentioned, the Paseo Colorado [in Pasadena]. Talk about how you create a mixed-use complex out of a—

Smith: Oh, my gosh. It's a whole new ballgame, Michael, it really is. But the funny part about this one was, this is where I was talking about the two different owners. You would think on a project like that, where you have residential on top and you have restaurant and retail down below, that the challenge would be getting all of the venting requirements for those restaurants and their kitchens and all that stuff up through the space of the residential and out the top of the building, and that furthermore all of the piping for the residential, all the toilets, all the sinks, all the kitchens that you need for getting all that back down through the retail. You would think that would be the problem. That was not the problem. The problem was getting the two owners [TrizecHahn for the retail/entertainment area and Post Properties for the residential units] to decide what they wanted to do. [laughs] You know, the real challenge, and we fought it a lot, was, well, "I've got to have that man lift down for my portion of my work for my building over here."

"Well, we can't have it down. We've got to be able to access the residential up above. We can't do that."

“Well, you never told us about it.”

“No, no, we did tell you about it. Remember when we did this phasing plan? Here’s the drawing that we all talked over it. Here’s the drawing. We did this drawing. We said we were going to have the man lift here, and right here’s the date. We said we were going to have it here until this date.”

Those were the headaches that caused us more frustration than the physical challenge of coordinating mechanical piping and venting through each other. So that was quite the challenge, and besides the fact that it was not a “just built up from a cornfield” development. I mean, it was an existing mall [Plaza Pasadena] that basically got scraped off, all the structural steel got scraped off the top of it, left the parking garage, the subterranean parking garage, left that in place, enhanced the foundations where they needed to be, and developed adaptations to the structural steel that was then going to go back up, and then also have a support for the residential buildings up on top, which were not single-story either. Those were multiple levels of apartments that I was building.

So it’s quite the technical challenge, a permitting challenge, a building use—you know, the City kind of pulled their hair out a little bit because they didn’t know to handle all the conditions that you would have as well with a mixed-use project. You would think that it would be straightforward, but it didn’t seem to be. So it was a challenge, and I think they’re always a challenge, especially when you’re trying to incorporate, leave in place the structure below, and adapt it to the new use, which was a big benefit to them, more than just the dollars. I forget why there was some benefit to the owners to leave

that in place as well. And to [unclear] to seismically retrofit the basement, too. So, yes, that was not an easy job.⁴

Adamson: So is the Pankow person who would have the most interaction with the owner the superintendent or is there a sponsor or a—

Smith: That's a good question.

Adamson: Or Charlie Pankow himself? Or Dean Stephan? Whoever's the top would be the one?

Smith: Mike, the way that I have always dealt with in the Pankow organization is that the superintendent executes the work. It's the sponsor's job to define that scope, so he has the relationship with the owner, because he's defining the scope for the superintendent. Superintendent's just getting it done. So that's the ideal situation. Unfortunately, it seems like a lot of times we defile that separation of church and state, and I don't know if maybe it's just me, Mike, and that it's an egomaniac thing. We'd rather be in control of our own little world and not have somebody controlling us. But it just seems like it

⁴ On the construction of Paseo Colorado, see, "Getting Started: TrizecHahn, EE&K, Pankow Work Together to Remake Plaza Pasadena," *California Construction* (September 2000); Paul Napolitano, "Paseo Colorado Pasadena Project Incorporates a New Steel Design into Existing Structure," *California Construction* (November 2000). On the development of the project, see, Hans Ibold, "Mall Is Giving Way to New Vision after Losing Appeal," *Los Angeles Business Journal*, 30 October 2000; Morris Newman, "The Mall Is Dead! Long Live the Mall!" *Grid 3* (May 2001); John Woolard, "Generation-Old Indoor Mall Reshaped as 'Urban Village,'" *Los Angeles Business Journal*, 23 July 2001; Kirsten Young, "Fix in the Mix: Pasadena Plans a New Retail-Residential Complex Downtown to Give Development a Boost," *Women's Wear Daily*, 25 July 2000.

makes it more difficult if you're also trying to handle the owner relationship, and a lot of times we bleed into that happening.

In particular on this last job I was on, the Montage [a luxury hotel, public garden, and commercial building in Beverly Hills], we had an owner's representative that was intimate with the overall project, and in the beginning I had no problem with it. He can be as involved as he wants to be. If he wants to talk about whether we're going to have a ramp down into the basement or not, fine. I'll talk to him all day long about that, if that's what makes him happy, as long as they keep paying the bills. But eventually it seemed to get in the way of the normal chain of command that things would work. He'd be going in and telling the mechanical guy, "Well, we're going to be making this change, so don't do this work."

And then we'd go out there and say, "Well, why aren't you doing this work?"

And he said, "Well, he told me not to."

"Well, you know, did somebody say that we're going to get more time for that?"

[laughs] So it became a disruption to the progress of the job and really to the completion of the job, I think. First, when we were just doing structure, it was not a problem, but when he got it into changing things on the fly, it became a problem.

So maybe if the sponsor was more—I don't know, I can't say that because he was there on the job site with me. I can't say he wasn't involved. He was totally involved with everything. We both fought the same problem. So maybe that's not really an issue. It's just this particular person was an issue. This particular style of person, if you will, right, that's an issue.

But I've always been more comfortable with give us the plans, get out of the way. Tell us what you want, and then we'll get it. To me, that's still the way it should be. Somebody else that's better people person that can influence the owner better than me just telling him, "Don't do that, stupid," and somebody that's just better on that side of the equation of the dollars and et cetera. I just think it's a different skill set that you need for that, as opposed to the skill set that you need for getting it built.

Adamson: Now, of course, every building's unique, but has it been your experience that the projects you've worked on have gotten more complex over time, or is that just not a good way to characterize how things have changed over twenty or thirty years?

Smith: I think it's probably safe to say that things have gotten more complex, especially for me in particular, going from building a garage to building a hotel, you know, that's quite a step. But going from doing a renovation to building a garage was nice. It was a little more organized, not as free-flowing, if you will.

So I would say things have gotten more complicated. Regulations have gotten more complicated. Codes have gotten more complicated. Competing requirements, while you want to have this for LEED [Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design], but you can't have that for power consumption, or even if it's a cost or whatever. So there are competing design requirements that you have now that do make things more complicated, I think.

Then the added regulation, we haven't even seen it yet as far as—well, California has always had a good program on tower cranes. In fact, I think they're the ones that are

kind of rewriting some of the stuff for back east, or they're kind of modeling some of the stuff, I think, off of Cal-OSHA, as far as the tower cranes go, the regulations. So I don't think that's really gotten that bad.

The environmental regulations have gotten a little more complicated. We're doing SWPSS and runoff control and air-quality management control and et cetera. They've made things more complicated. You've got to get a permit to have a generator. Runoff is a big deal. I think it's gotten more complicated than it used to be.

Adamson: Talking about the two owners on Paseo Colorado may have anticipated this question, but were there other projects you've been on that have had potential events that could have resulted in delays or cost overruns that you had to address?

Smith: Well, I do remember at Pac [Pacific] Plaza [a 9-story office building in Daly City, California] where the soils report had water, groundwater, way down, and as we were digging the footings, we found some kind of an underground river that came through, and so that was a challenge because we couldn't develop that portion of the project right away. They had to have the soils guy do certain analysis, and they had to decide how they were going to handle the foundations along there. So we ended up, as I recall, trying to build around it, and that caused us headaches. That was a challenge for getting it built not only for schedule, but for cost as well.

I know that when I was playing operations manager for that little bit of time, that Jeff Doke had a problem on Fourth and Harrison, where there was a DWP [Department of Water & Power] line that needed to get rerouted through the project, and that didn't

get moved when it was supposed to get moved, and yet they wanted us to proceed. So we ended up doing some very odd things as far as—so there were always challenges. That was a challenge for him.

We had a challenge at Montage for just getting the answers from the architects as far as them proceeding with the course of their design and getting us the layouts, the finalized layouts for the condos and for the hotel rooms and for the public areas, and those rooms, as I remember, caused us to take one side and building up instead of being able to proceed this way. We had to proceed up over here and then come back and proceed up over here, which caused a lot of temporary handrail that we wouldn't have had to do, leading edge work that was kind of a safety concern that we had to handle.

So, yeah, it seems like every job there's always an opportunity for something to go haywire, and I guess that's part of the job is to help mitigate those for the owner.

Adamson: A couple of questions from this profile which I've done, dates from 1991, but at the time it said that your management style was based on relating to people in the field and motivating them to get the job done, quote, "while maintaining a sense of humor about the importance of the job," unquote. I'm just wondering if you can provide a case example that illustrates your management style.

Smith: I don't know that I can, Mike. I do think that fun is a part of it, and I do love the joke-telling that goes along with a lot of it. I do like that part of it. It seems like the elevator guys always have the best jokes, just kind of an aside for you, Mike. But in any case, I don't know, I don't like to browbeat people into submission. That's not my style.

That's not my style, "My way or the highway." I think my style is more of, "Hey, what's holding us up here? What can we do to get it going? Let's have fun with it if we can."

I guess my management is that I do believe that most people do want to do a good job, and all you've got to do is harness that and give them the opportunity to perform, and maybe a little bit inspiration to perform. Hopefully, that inspiration isn't in the form of a foot in the butt. That's not inspiration. [laughs] So, I don't know, Mike. I have kind of a self-analyzing problem. I can't do that very well.

Adamson: That's fair enough.

Smith: But that's definitely not my style to be, you know, on high, giving the orders down to the guys, no, that's not the deal.

Adamson: This profile also noted how much you had traveled in your first thirteen years, and noted that at least three kids that you had at the time had all been born in different states.

Smith: Oh, Mike, we have four kids now. We like to say they were all born in different states, still, because while Daniel was born in Oregon, and Patrick was born in Wisconsin, Michael was born in Northern California, and Kelly was born in Southern California, and so those might as well be separate states, if you know what I mean.

[laughs] So we still say that all of our kids were born in different states, but we always add that caveat.

Yeah, we did move a lot at the beginning. We started with down here. We moved from here to Portland, Portland back down to here, down here to Milwaukee, Milwaukee to Northern California. But then Northern California, Southern California, then we've been here ever since, pretty much. I did a ten-month commuting trip at one point to the Bay Area for a job that was only going to be—the structure was only going to last ten months or a year or whatever, and didn't make sense to move the family for that. The company was always really good about that. When the kids were little, we didn't have a problem with pulling up stakes and going when they were still below kindergarten. By the time Daniel got into second grade, we'd always heard from fifth grade on, you kind of want to keep them in the same spot if you could, and we were actually able to make that work, if you will, with the company. The whole time the kids were growing up, we've always been in Southern California. We moved once on our own from one side of town to the other, just to move from a smaller place to a bigger place.

But, yes, we moved a lot at the beginning, and we haven't moved hardly at all since, and that's worked out for us. Now the last of our kids, Kelly, is going to be a senior in high school next year, so I don't know, maybe we'll have to start moving again. But, no, we did do a lot of it at the beginning, and we didn't mind doing it. We enjoyed it. I mean, we enjoyed living in Portland. We loved our time in Portland, loved our time in Milwaukee, as stated, and Northern California was great. We really enjoyed living up there.

Actually, where we ended up was probably the least favorite of all the places, you know. Now I think we'd have a hard time even going back north because the weather is

so much warmer here, overall, more sunny days here. We'd probably have a tough time. No, I don't think we would, actually. We're pretty adaptable, I think, and we enjoyed wherever we lived. We loved the seasons back there, even when it was cold, and so I think we'd adapt to anything. Yes, we moved a lot at the beginning, but we didn't really consider it a hardship.

Adamson: From what I've gathered in talking to other people, it may be an industry thing, but in the construction industry, that you were just expected to go wherever you go.

Smith: Yeah. Mike, I think the way it works is you can do two things. You can either work for a bunch of different companies in one area, or you can work for one company in a bunch of different areas. Did I say that right?

Adamson: Yes.

Smith: But, actually, with Pankow, we've always had an operation in Southern California, in Northern California, and Hawaii, and so we kind of been able to—I mean, as far as like Al Fink moving over, but he moved back to the mainland. But at that point, his kids were already out of the house.

Adamson: A lot of the moving that is across the country seemed to have to do with Winmar, and I don't think that relationship has produced any projects in the last twenty years.

Smith: No. Then we had another one, too. I don't know if it's been mentioned, but Corporate Property Investors was another mall owner that we did a lot of the mall projects for. But the two in New York, Walt Whitman Mall and Roosevelt Field Mall, were both for Corporate Property Investors. So that was another owner besides Winmar. There was another owner like that, Corporate Property Investors, that we did a lot of work for. We did the Brea Mall jobs. We did the Westminster Mall. Seems to me like there was at least one more and maybe multiple times at those sites, the smaller stuff, and then Walt Whitman Mall and Roosevelt Field Mall. Roosevelt Field Mall was a big deal back east, around Long Island and New York. So a lot of our guys were back there.

That's one good thing that—I bet it was Charlie that looked out for, was the people that were making that sacrifice and moving, it was a program to not get hurt on that, I think, from the company's side. They didn't want to give away money, but they were always fair about, well, "Okay, you can continue to pay your rent on your property here, or you make your payment here. We'll pay your rent here and the difference between what you can rent your place for and what your payment is." So they didn't want you to get rich off it, but they didn't want to hurt you on it either. When Charlie was around, I think that happened a lot, very well, that people's lives that were put into a quandary or into at least uncertainty with moving were at least not having to worry about the financial side of it and so on.

Adamson: So the fact that you spent the better part of the last ten or fifteen years in Southern California, it's just because there's work here or this change in company sensitivity to—

Smith: Well, maybe some of that. I think it was mainly just the fact that there were projects here, and there's always been some work here since then, and then it was definitely, though, Mike, I was definitely the sensitivity to moving at one time, because they could have asked me to move up there for a year, but they didn't. They said, "No, we'll work out something for a per diem or whatever for you to stay up there." And I didn't hurt the company either, I ended up staying with a friend of mine, and so we didn't have a real hotel cost, and we enjoyed our time together as well. I paid him some rent, called it rent, paid him something that he used for beer money for us, so it worked out good. [laughter]

Adamson: So if you look at the body of your work, what has been your favorite Pankow project?

Smith: Oh, wow, didn't expect that question, Mike. Well, as far as just the most fun, I think it was probably the Glendale Galleria parking garages, just because it was a fun job, we made money, and the owner was great, left us alone, let us do our thing. "When are you going to start demo, Kevin?"

"Well, we just started it on the other end of the job."

"Oh, okay, good." [laughs]

“We’ve been working down there all morning.”

“Oh, okay, all right. Good. Good. Good.” [laughs]

So, I don’t know, that’s a tough question, because you enjoy different aspects of the different jobs. We enjoyed living in Milwaukee. The weather was a challenge, but we enjoyed the people there. We enjoyed living in Portland, the sheer beauty of the surrounding mountains over here, the ocean, drive to the mountains or drive to the ocean. “Which one do you want to do this weekend, hon?” So we enjoyed that.

As far as the jobs themselves, I don’t know. Some of the early jobs where you were still young and learning and had great mentors were a lot of fun. So I’d have to think about that one and the individual aspect of each one, I think, Mike. I can’t pin one. But I would say in my recent past here that the Glendale Galleria parking garages, maybe even the MOB [medical office building] right afterwards, because that job went almost exactly according to plan.

Adamson: Which job was it?

Smith: The MOB and the parking garage at White Memorial. It was one of those where we planned the work, and then it just went exactly like we thought it was going to go. There was no having to adapt here to this, that, or whatever. Dick Benedict, who was a field superintendent, and I, kept looking at each other, saying, “Something’s got to go wrong. Something’s got to happen. The other shoe’s got to drop here sooner or later.” It never did. Made money, and nobody got hurt at all, the job got done on time, and the owner was happy with it in the end. So those were good jobs. And we had a good crew.

I should never leave that out. We had a fun team. We had some carpenters that were characters on the job, and we had an engineer on the job that was a character, and just the personalities were always fun. I think Gino got the nickname “Crash” because they went out one night driving go-carts and he burned the clutch up on a couple of them or something, and so he became “Crash.” Anyway, it was just a good time.

Adamson: If you looked at the Pankow City mural, do you have a favorite Pankow building just as a company-wide to look at?

Smith: I think probably the flashiest is the [Waikiki] Landmark job. I had nothing to do with it, but it’s the one that has the bridge across, the two twin towers with the bridge that connect right up at the top. It’s actually that job right there [points to photo on wall] only that’s, I think, under construction. So that’s actually hoisting the steel that connected the buildings across, I think.

But, no, I wouldn’t say I really have a favorite. I think some of those jobs in Hawaii are really nice with the glass on the outside because they reflect the mountains on either side, so they kind of blend in by reflection only. So as far as the neatest-looking, actually, I hate to say it, but the Montage Hotel that we just got done is pretty flashy on the outside, if that’s what we’re going by.

Adamson: What has changed most about the company since you started?

Smith: Good question. What has changed the most? Well, we've gotten bigger. I think in the earlier days we were only maybe even forty, fifty people strong, overall maybe sixty. We have a lot more people, a lot bigger, and, I hate to say it, because we try to keep it as intimate as we can, but I think we do have instances where we have guys that are working for PSPL [Pankow Special Projects Ltd.]—and we didn't have all the different divisions either, Mike. Everybody worked for CPBL [Charles Pankow Builders Ltd.]. Then we developed this division of Special Projects, which was a great source of income. It did seem like it took a different type of person to do that than what it did on the structural side or the base building side, as we call it. But you get into this where sometimes we don't even know who else is working for the company or we don't know them that well, whereas before we always knew everybody fairly well. So I think that's probably a big change, the size of the company and the fact that because we're bigger and have our different entities, that we're not as cross-pollinated, I guess, is the word, maybe.

I don't know that—well, yes, I guess I could tell you. Matt Burden is running the [Corcoran] plant and [unclear] is his guy, so I guess it's not quite totally opposite, I mean totally insulated entities, but I think maybe that's a change that we've had.

I think probably the appreciation by owners, I think, has changed. I think that in the old days the owners appreciated us more, I think, in those days. These days, I don't think the owners—they like to just use a contractor and abuse them and send them on their way. At least it seems like it. Maybe it's just because I'm older and exposed to that more, Mike, but I think that's something, at least for me, has changed over time. We had owners that appreciated us before, and it's rarer nowadays.

Adamson: What are the first couple things that come to mind if you think about what makes this company a successful organization?

Smith: I think it's the people. I think that's probably the main thing is that we have qualified, motivated, and basically good people that have a moral or two among us. I think that's it. I think it's the people, and then it's the idea of taking a job. In the old days, they called them salvage jobs, where they would take a project that the owner had beat somebody else up to get priced, and they couldn't make it work. The costs just don't work. Then we'd take a look at it and say, well, if we design this into it and design this out of it, this is your budget, then let's work to that. So then we really make a job happen that wasn't going to happen because they didn't have the blend of buildability versus architecture that was needed to get it to where it could proceed. So did I answer the question?

Adamson: I think so.

Smith: I forgot the question already, Mike.

Adamson: What makes Pankow a success?

Smith: I think it's the people and then it's the idea, the idea of trying to work to a budget and a schedule. Yeah, I think that's it.

Adamson: How does the company or how did or it still does reflect Charlie Pankow's personality?

Smith: Well, I think we've already kind of hit on that, Mike, in that Charlie cared about his people, still cared about the superintendents, and even though he definitely wasn't a real people person, you know, but I mean, you could tell that he cared about keeping people working with the company that knew what they were doing, and I think that we're still that kind of company. We take care of the people that are making things happen and making the company grow and be an asset to our owners. So I think it's that, and then he was always about the idea. "Hey, what if we did this? Hey, you got those beams froze in that bed, you can't get them out? Why don't you try this? Why don't you get some ice and put it on the top, and maybe that will make it contract?" Even if it didn't work, it might. "Hey, it's a good idea. We'll try that." So it was about the idea, about the better mousetrap, I guess, if you will, Mike. So anyway, the people and the idea, it's the same thing, really.

Adamson: I asked about your meeting Charlie for the first time. Is there any other anecdote about Charlie Pankow that you can say that illustrates his character or his leadership qualities or some aspect of his personality?

Smith: Probably not that many, Mike, because, again, I was a couple rungs down the ladder from operating with Charlie on a daily basis or even on a weekly basis. But I do

know, like I said, from his visits at the job sites when I'm the superintendent and he's coming out to the job to see what's going on.

So, one more time, Mike, the question again?

Adamson: Are there any anecdotes that stand out to illustrate his—

Smith: And this I wasn't even involved in it. I was kind of peripherally involved in it, but I know Brett Partridge was kind of wringing his hands over it. I think it was one of the jobs that shut down. I think it was Carlsbad. It's a tough job where the owner basically ran out of money midstream. This is like the only time in the history of the company this has ever happened, and so it was new territory for all of us, really. It was tough getting the owner to pay us. They wanted us to stay on the project. Anyway, it was just a tough deal, and we ended up having to stop. They told us to stop halfway through, and they mothballed the project, basically, until the economics again made sense that you could get a loan and et cetera.

So I remember Brett Partridge telling me he was wringing his hands about, well, "Should I pay these guys or not," and Charlie just made it very simple for Brett. He said, "Well, did the owner pay us?"

He said, "Well, yeah, but we're going to have all of these other subs that are out here, and we've got all this so we've got to pay [unclear]."

He said, "Well, then pay them, Brett. Pay them. It's that simple. Don't make it any more complicated. If we have to go out of pocket for something down the road, well,

that's what we'll have to do, but the right thing to do is to pay them, so pay them." So that was one that I remember. But it didn't come from me. It came third-hand.

It seemed like, I think, that's pretty much it, that I can remember, Mike, right now.

Adamson: What is the company doing to sustain the kind of company that Charlie Pankow created after you and everyone else who knew him or worked with him are gone?

Smith: I think it's just trying to hand forward the principles that Charlie built the company on. We're trying to do it through the more, I guess, formal management style of, what do they call them, core values, are the today terms, right, Mike, that you hear flying around all the time. We're trying to do it, I think, with the mission statement. That's the other one everybody uses these days. I kind of chuckle, but, I mean, it's nice. It's not silly. In any case, but it's kind of that. We're trying, again, it's the idea. It's the people. We've got to take care of your people. I think our guys are trying to bring in the success factors program where you outline goals for people. Well, we weren't really that formal before. Again, take on as much as you can, right, when you can, right? But, yeah, people today, it seems like, with the structure of society, the network of society changing, people are maybe more in for it for me or whatever. So they're trying to outline for them what their goals should be or what are your goals.

Actually, I think we were always about that a little bit, it just wasn't that formal. It wasn't setting something up. It was somebody asking you a question. Well, what do

you want to do? You need to think about that. What do you want to do with the company? Do you want to become a sponsor or what do you want to do? So I think that we've always had that, but I think the company's definitely trying to carry that forward, and that we're maybe even a little more structured because you don't have the personality or the persona, if you will, of Charlie dictating this. But this is still what we need to do. So anyway, I think the company is definitely trying. I think we're trying in a bunch of different ways.

Adamson: This is the Charlie Pankow legacy project, so my last question is, and I hope I'm not being redundant, but what is the best way of understanding Charlie Pankow's contributions to the building industry?

Smith: Boy, I don't know, Mike.

Adamson: Or the company in general. Where is its place, its reputation in the industry and what is it known for, if you want to put it that way?

Smith: Yes. It's his personal reputation that really brought the company's reputation up in that he was always aboveboard and didn't make any side deals or was on the guard against collusion or anything like that that kept us out of the gutter and aboveboard with the industry. His penchant, I guess, if you will, for the technical side of using ideas and technology and the new stuff to our advantage, to the project's advantage, to the owner's advantage. He personally brought that to the company, and the company has grown on

that basis of if the right idea is there for this project, let's use that. If that doesn't work for this project, we'll use something else.

So I think his personal legacy did become the company's legacy, the honesty, the idea, the people. So I think there's a definite parallel there. Our reputation in the industry is we're not a hire-and-fire contractor. We don't hire people and then get rid of them the next day. We try to keep our people growing, and that's kind of what we're about, so I think that's how the two mirror, if you will.

Adamson: Very good. I think we can leave it there.

Smith: Very good.

Adamson: I thank you for your time.

[End of interview]