

MICHIGAN CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY MOURNS PASSING OF RALPH STEPHENSON

By Michael Lawson, CAM Industry Relations



RALPH REMEMBERED

"He had a kindness that permeated everything he did."

Phyllis Brooks, retired editor of CAM Magazine

"It was always great to have Ralph on a project because he brought so much knowledge to the job."

Don Templin, retired engineer / Board Member, Construction Federal Credit Union

"The industry has suffered the loss of a dear friend and he will be missed very much."

Kevin Koehler, president of the Construction Association of Michigan

"For over 50 years, Ralph Stephenson helped the construction industry build a stable foundation for project success."

E. Dewey Little, journalist

Ralph Stephenson, P.E., an icon in every sense of the word, passed away on March 11th in Mt. Pleasant. Stephenson was a driving force in the development of the Institute for Construction Management, the forerunner to the Construction Association of Michigan's Training and Education Center (CAMTEC).

During his fifty-plus years of engineering work, Stephenson amassed a very long list of achievements. He also earned a deep level of respect from his colleagues, clients and those for whom he was a mentor. One way that respect was reflected is in the trust accorded him by those who completed the Michigan Society of Professional Engineers' (MSPE) *Standing Neutral Training Program*. The methodology and goals of the training program were based largely on Ralph Stephenson's seminars on dispute resolution.

"Known to many as 'Mr. Construction,' his success as a problem-solver was probably his best known quality," said E. Dewey Little, longtime construction writer and contributing editor for CAM Magazine. "Much of the magic he brought to projects came from his inborn curiosity about technical matters."

However, it is not known by many that he was also an accomplished trumpeter. Early in life Stephenson was attracted to the discipline of music studies and he actually entered Lawrence Institute of Technology on a music scholarship. In his own words he recalled, "that was probably the only music scholarship the school ever offered." Stephenson played for the renowned Detroit Symphony Orchestra and used the money he earned to help with his college expenses.

After graduating from Lawrence Tech in 1943 with a degree mechanical engineering, Stephenson joined the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers. Upon leaving the Army three years later, he went on to earn a Masters degree in civil engineering from Michigan State University. 1948 was a great year for Mr. Stephenson as he graduated with a mas-

ter's degree, was offered a position as a structural engineer for Smith, Hinchman & Grylls Associates in Detroit and married his longtime girlfriend, Betty. In 1992, he moved his business to Mt. Pleasant and set up his office built on the banks of the Chippewa River.

Ralph Stephenson was also a pioneer in developing most of the techniques used in CPM, the Critical Path Method. He later co-authored "The Critical Path Method," a book that was a required university textbook for many years. He also wrote several books on construction management, and such was his acclaim that he was asked to give technical and management seminars in the United States, Canada and Europe.

Mr. Stephenson was very involved with founding and promotion of the Michigan Junta, one of the oldest constructor fellowships in the state. The group was created to improve the construction profession by advancing the professionalism of its members. Formed in the mid-1960s, the Junta is based on the principles of Ben Franklin's "American Philosophical Society for Promoting Useful Knowledge."

His connection to the Construction Association of Michigan began in 1963 (when it was known as the Builders and Traders Exchange of Detroit). He spearheaded the growth and development of Exchange's Institute for Construction Management, now known as CAMTEC. As director of ICM he designed a curriculum based on the types of courses that were needed in the industry but not available. He sought instructors that had solid practical experience and helped them to develop course content that encouraged thoughtful solutions to challenging situations.

Perhaps his wife, Betty, summed up most precisely the quality of character that will be Ralph Stephenson's most enduring legacy. "He never turned away anyone with a problem or in need of help finding a job," she reflected. "That was the ethical and moral standard by which he lived." ❖