Getting to know Committee 30’s, Marcus Dersch

Why did you decide to choose a career in railway engineering?

DERSCH: I chose a career in the rail industry because of the people. I appreciate that relationships matter and have witnessed that the people I worked with in graduate school at the Rail Transportation Engineering Center (RailTEC) at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (Illinois) and as an engineering intern at Union Pacific (UP) are some of the same people I am interacting with today. I have remained in the rail industry because I have appreciated that the work has been challenging, rewarding, and always changing.

AREMA: How did you get started?

DERSCH: I started as a research assistant at Illinois and was able to work on a project funded by BNSF investigating the effect of coal fouling on ballast strength. I was then exposed to additional industry challenges and solutions through the William H. Hay Railroad Engineering Seminar series put on by Illinois. At one of these seminars I met David Connell, former vice president of Engineering at UP, and subsequently accepted an internship with UP. Through these experiences I was hooked on the rail industry.

AREMA: How did you get involved in AREMA and your committee?

DERSCH: I learned about AREMA via the Illinois AREMA Student Chapter, which does a fantastic job of recruiting and educating students about the rail industry. I naturally became more involved upon graduation given RailTEC believes that our findings must be relevant to industry and adequately disseminated. I have been actively involved with Committee 30 - Ties since 2011 and regularly work with colleagues and students to turn research findings into improved recommended practices.

AREMA: Outside of your job and the hard work you put into AREMA, what are your hobbies?

DERSCH: Being a father of two young girls keeps me plenty busy. But, when I am not working or spending time with them, I love being outdoors, woodworking, volunteering with the Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA), cooking, and building into and mentoring young men.

AREMA: Tell us about your family.

DERSCH: I have been happily married to Kirsten since 2013 and have been blessed with two girls, Madison (3) and Kinsie (5), and have one boy expected to arrive in May. AREMA: If you could share one interesting fact about yourself with the readers of RT&S, what would it be?

DERSCH: I grew up in sports and my favorite sport was baseball. As a pitcher, our fastball could regularly hit 92 mph and top out at 95 mph. I have also torn my ACL three times over the years and have had multiple former students who are serving the industry.

AREMA: What is your biggest achievement?

DERSCH: I feel so blessed to be where I am. I work with a fantastic team, get the opportunity to encourage the next generation of railroad engineers, and make an impact on the industry with research findings. I see it as my job to help students grow into mentors who will be prepared to thrive as engineers and have the skills to solve the challenges they will face throughout their career. Therefore, I am hopeful that the improved recommended practices will lead to more resilient components and safer railroads. I am more hopeful that the students I get to interact with go on to make an even bigger impact in the industry with their careers.

AREMA: What advice would you give to someone who is trying to pursue a career in the railway industry?

DERSCH: I would recommend being quick to listen; there is so much wisdom within the industry and when we stop to listen, we can learn what has been tried in the past which can save time and resources moving forward. Additionally, be open to new ideas; though the industry can be slow to change in some areas, it is always changing. Working to create positive change helps to better serve the industry.

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2021 MEETINGS

MAY 18-19
Committee 15 – Steel Structures Virtual Meeting

MAY 26
Committee 14 – Yards & Terminals Virtual Meeting

JUNE 3-4
Committee 8 – Concrete Structures and Foundations Kansas City, Mo.

JUNE 10
Committee 33 – Electric Energy Utilization Virtual Meeting

JUNE 14-15
Committee 15 – Steel Structures Virtual Meeting

JUNE 17-18
Committee 8 – Concrete Structures and Foundations Sandpoint, Idaho

2022 MEETINGS

FEB. 8-9
Committee 15 – Steel Structures Fort Worth, Texas

MAY 17-18
Committee 15 – Steel Structures Chicago, Ill.

JUNE 9-10
Committee 8 – Concrete Structures and Foundations Anchorage, Alaska

SEP 27-28
Committee 15 – Steel Structures Virtual Meeting

UPCOMING COMMITTEE MEETINGS

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AREMA: What advice would you give to someone who is trying to pursue a career in the railway industry?

DERSCH: I would recommend being quick to listen; there is so much wisdom within the industry and when we stop to listen, we can learn what has been tried in the past which can save time and resources moving forward. Additionally, be open to new ideas; though the industry can be slow to change in some areas, it is always changing. Working to create positive change helps to better serve the industry.