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World-renowned concert expert's contribution supports SIUE Department of Construction Student Involvement

by Megan Weiser

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EDWARDSVILLE - The Southern Illinois University Edwardsville School of Engineering's (SOE) Department of Construction is an award-winning program with a strong reputation for producing successful graduates prepared to shape an evolving industry with indelible global impact.

In 1979, the firm foundation of the program was set in stone, rather placed in concrete, by world-renowned concrete expert Luke Snell, PE, professor emeritus and founding chair of the SOE Department of Construction.

Snell has a storied history with the SOE as a scholar and educator. He retired as professor emeritus in 2002. But, the Edwardsville resident's passion for concrete and

SIUE's growing program has held strong. His recent contribution of \$15,000 will support the SIUE student chapter of the American Concrete Institute (ACI).

While his concrete expertise led him to successful work in industry and consulting, he decided it was future industry leaders he could benefit most. Instead of troubleshooting problems, he wanted to prevent them by educating future leaders.

"Concrete is the second most used material in the world ... only surpassed by water," Snell said. "As I developed my research and gained real-world experience as a consultant, using my undergraduate and graduate activities, I seemed to have a knack for solving concrete construction problems. This led me to SIUE to lead the newly created undergraduate construction program. In this role, I could thwart some of those construction problems by reaching students and educating them on good techniques."

Based on his own successful experiences in student competition, Snell made it a priority to get SIUE students involved in the American Concrete Institute and expose them to experiential learning opportunities.

"The ACI started its first student program in 1980, and I brought six students to compete in the concrete cube competition," Snell recalled. "Our team won the competition, beating out students from much larger schools like the University of Illinois. This was a defining moment for SIUE's ACI student chapter and the construction program as it brought immediate recognition."

Since SIUE brought home that first trophy, its display case has filled with awards and accolades from student competitions. To Snell, the most meaningful show of success with which the students leave their activities are job connections, national exposure and travel opportunities. That's why his support for such student involvement has never wavered.

"Many students can trace their first job to involvement in these resume-building competitions," Snell said. "These experiences present opportunities to rub shoulders with professors in the field, travel to new places across the country and beyond, gain name recognition for SIUE's student chapter, and offer important industry exposure."

The ACI student competitions have grown dramatically since their inception, presenting ample opportunity as well as higher costs and stiffer competition for participating SIUE students. Snell's generous contribution to the ACI student chapter, and the corresponding development fund that's been established, will help students continue their involvement by assisting with registration fees, materials and travel costs.

“Student involvement is hugely important,” Snell said. “In fact, it was winning a student competition that led me to believe ‘wow, I’m on the right path.’ These competitions have become internationally attended, competitive processes. I want our students to continue to compete at a high level, and participate in these impactful opportunities that bring recognition to the quality of our students and SIUE.”

Since his retirement, Snell and his wife Billie, an SIUE alumna, have traveled extensively around the globe, especially to developing countries, to educate others on the value of concrete, its uses, the importance of training and safety. The concrete consultant has visited such countries as Mongolia, Ethiopia, Ghana, Saudi Arabia and Singapore.

He remains active in the Missouri ACI Chapter, which includes Illinois’ Madison and St. Clair Counties. Snell weaves concrete into all he does, leading workshops and hosting public presentations.

The biggest clarification he makes to those less familiar with concrete? Cement and concrete are not one in the same. Rather, cement is the powder that binds the rock, sand and water that comprise concrete.

ACI conventions are held twice annually. The 2019 student competitions will be held in March in Quebec City, Canada and in October in Cincinnati, Ohio.

For more information on contributing to the Luke Snell Chapter of the American Concrete Institute at SIUE Development, visit siue.edu/give/ACI.

The SIUE School of Engineering offers one of the most comprehensive and affordable engineering programs in the St. Louis region with eight undergraduate degrees, five master’s degrees and a cooperative doctoral program. Students learn from expert faculty, perform cutting-edge research, and participate in intercollegiate design competitions. Companies in the metropolitan St. Louis area provide students challenging internships and co-op opportunities, which often turn into permanent employment. Students gain hands-on experience in the School’s state-of-the-art facilities, including the new Fowler Student Design Center.