



## JIM D. SPEAKMAN

*Former Patron's Board President, Middle Tennessee State University*

### What is your involvement in the CIM Program?

Since 1995, when CIM was conceived, I've promoted and participated in the program. I have served on the Patrons Board during this entire duration, and I was its third president. I am honored to say that I was involved in the early days when a small group of volunteers did some "heavy lifting" to create this program. Each of us realized that if we could get it started, it would have enormous impact on the whole industry. The Tennessee Concrete Association and all of its members were heavily involved in its creation, and their support continues today. We knew that getting national participation would be paramount; thus, we initiated the National Steering Committee and asked for participation. Thankfully, many executives from our industry's top companies took ownership, and the program began to have the national profile we knew it would need for success.

### Why did you get involved with the CIM Program, MTSU?

I felt, and still feel, this is a way to give back to the industry that has provided my livelihood for 25 years. The concrete industry has always been somewhat stigmatized as a dirty type of business that many don't deem worthy as a career. When I'd go to high schools to promote the concrete industry, I found that most students looked to engineering, IT, or the legal and medical fields as a career path. I recognized that we needed to change that attitude. CIM gives the industry a cachet it didn't have before – a professional path. It helps show concrete as a high-tech, extremely engineered industry that is vital to the infrastructure of our country.

### What are your thoughts about the industry/academic partnership developed between CIM and its industry partners and patrons?

This partnership is truly unique. The industry is able to work closely with curriculum designers at MTSU to determine courses tailored to students. Further, the partnership is designed to change continually in order to upgrade courses and keep the CIM Program state-of-the-art and relevant to today's industry. And we have long-term involvement from students. One of the visions of the initial Patrons Board was to have CIM graduates be the guiding stars of the program by heading the Patrons Board. Today, 80 percent of the CIM Patrons Board at MTSU is composed of graduates. The MTSU/CIM Program pursued grants to assist in creating several other CIM programs throughout the United States.

### Why should other companies in the concrete industry get involved in the CIM Program?

As the concrete industry continues to get more technical, environmental regulations and concerns grow. In response to these trends, the concrete industry has a genuine need to have educated, dedicated individuals. The graduates from the CIM Program are prepared to deal with these issues. Not surprisingly, it's less expensive to hire a specialized graduate than it is to try to train someone with a more general degree.

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