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Newsmaker

Cementing A Titan Reputation



Wednesday - June 08, 2005

By Yu Shing Ting

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What if there was an invention that could simplify city road construction — reduce a project's duration and the time you'd have to spend fighting traffic due to lane closures?



Nathalie Walker photo

Alfred Yee says he loves to solve complex problems with simple solutions

Well, local firm Grace Pacific Precast Inc. had such a dream, and knew it didn't have to go far to find the engineer to do it. Alfred Yee, president of Applied Technology Corporation, has spent his career developing simpler solutions for building structures of all kinds. He's a worldrenowned expert in the precast and prestressed concrete construction industry with more than 15 patented inventions for use in everything from oceangoing vessels

to high-rise buildings to single-family housing.

His latest invention is the precast concrete Kwik Slab. Measuring approximately 12 feet long and 8 feet wide, these premade concrete slabs would be developed ahead of time at Grace Pacific's Precast Yard at Campbell Industrial Park and then trucked to a paving site, dropped in place by a crane and filled in with grout. What once took three weeks now would take only three days.

The technology was developed for use specifically at city bus stops.

"The problem is at bus stops the asphalt begins to dimple due to the weight of the bus," says Yee, a Saint Louis School graduate. "The way to solve the problem is to put concrete there instead because it's stronger.

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"Sounds simple, right? But have you ever tried to block one lane of traffic on a two-lane road? The traffic gets backed up for miles. Not only that, but it takes time to dig up the asphalt, put in forms, bring in steel bars and pour the concrete."

Then, says Yee, you still can't park the bus in the new area for a few weeks until the concrete sets.

"But if I make it at the plant ahead of time and let it sit for two months, then you can just bring in this preformed piece and drop it in."

This kind of technology has already been used in other large metropolitan areas such as New York and New Jersey. Yee took inspiration from early precast methods, but knew he could invent a better system.

It took less than a year for Yee to come up with the Kwik Pavers. He tested his newest invention by building one stretch of roadway with the Kwik Slabs at the production plant.

"Every day the concrete trucks, which carry the heaviest loads, roll over it," says Yee. "I was just there a few days ago and it looks very good."

Confident that his design is sturdy in its structure, Yee sees other applications for the Kwik Slab as well.

"You can patch potholes, do construction on airfields or build an extra lane on the highway fast," he says. Kwik Pavers could also be transported to remote locations that don't have access to concrete or asphalt production facilities.

If the savings in time doesn't persuade you, there are additional social and environmental aspects as well.

"If you do things the conventional way, then it's three weeks of traffic interruption and all that time you're losing gasoline, you're polluting the air, you lose man hours because people are late for work," says Yee. "People get frustrated and it leads to road rage."

And what about the cost? The slab itself will cost about \$1,000 to make. Each project, however, would likely consist of multiple slabs with other costs for site excavation, transportation and installation.

"It certainly isn't going to cost more to do it in three days versus three weeks," says Yee. "Yes, asphalt is cheaper, but it requires more maintenance. Like anything else, you pay less now and pay more later, or you pay a little more now and pay less later. Concrete is the best solution for our roadways, but it costs money."



Photo from Grace Pacific
A crew installs one of Yee's Kwik Slabs

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Factoring in environmental, social and economic issues in his designs is a challenge Yee continually faces.

"Nothing excites me like a difficult design problem that can be met by a simple solution," says Yee. "In my role as a structural engineer, I focus on the savings in natural resources through economic designs. In other words, to be competitive in our profession, we have to come up with a design that takes less labor, less material, less energy, less time."



Photo from Grace Pacific

Yee explains how his Kwik Pavers work at a demonstration.

Technology is the driving force that makes all things possible for Yee and his many inventions. He has received numerous awards for his contribution to the industry, especially for his innovative design of precast and prestressed concrete high-rise buildings along the Pacific Rim.

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