

## MEMBER SPOTLIGHT: Bruce Pitts, Renaissance Man

By Diana Bjornskov



**Bruce Pitts**  
BCA Member

BRUCE PITTS IS UNSTOPPABLE. He's a leader in the BCA as former Association Treasurer and other elective roles, a commissioning on-site trainer, and best practices developer. He's deeply involved with his career as a commissioning provider, his community, family life, providing occasional program and policy guidance to utilities, schools and the city of Seattle, and – when he has time – an avid golfer and soccer fan. So, it's not just the six shots of home-pressed espresso every morning ... he's just a high-energy, enthusiastic guy with a passion for commissioning and community.

Bruce didn't choose commissioning as a career path – it chose him. He left school to help the family after his dad's debilitating stroke, taking a job with his uncle's electrical contracting company. It wasn't long before he was designing systems as a draftsman. He soon married and started a new life.

A native Californian, Bruce and his wife Dana moved from California to Washington State in the early 1970s. Bruce was introduced socially to the man who became his first boss at Wood Harbinger (WH), where he continues to work today.

Early on, he did testing, balancing (when A/E firms did this as a construction administration service), system startup – and even design work – for projects designed by WH. Then, in 1979 Bruce was assigned his first big project leading a team on the million SF-plus design and retrofit for the Navy's Trident Training Facility in Bangor, Washington. Initial facility construction was completed in 1977, but just two years later there was a need for documenting and troubleshooting the existing building's major functional problems: for example, one entire wing of the building was piped backwards and the supply heating system never had worked. Eight large air handling units had been installed backwards – next to 14 of the classrooms – and Bruce hired the founding HVAC acoustical engineer who measured the noise level equivalency in the NC 80 range (too high to teach). Needless to say, the classrooms had never been used.

Through this experience Bruce came face to face with the fact that buildings don't always work as designed. As his career continued to expand during the 1980s he started

designing mechanical systems and doing construction administration (CA) of WH projects. As buildings became more complex and the use of direct digital controls started overshadowing pneumatics, it also became harder to make buildings function properly.

As Bruce made his way through designing projects like the east wing addition to University of Washington Hospital in Seattle, he also managed fast-track delivery where design packages and construction leap-frogged each other through the process – a unique way of learning how systems work while designing them! As a result of his TAB and CA experience Bruce developed a methodology that he describes as “an infant stage of today's commissioning process.” He help write the job description for that role, and the university hired Rick Casault –author of the first commissioning process manual – to fill it. Rick's colleague at the university, John Hines, became the first Director of the BCA.

Over the years Bruce and his (now internal) Construction Administration Group took on projects like the remodel and expansion of SeaTac airport and his first “true commissioning” project at Ballard High School. He came to the conclusion that as systems became more complicated buildings were not being delivered fully functional, EVER. There had to be a better way, and he was committed to finding it.

That's when Bruce discovered the BCA. He was asked to join the founding members, but declined – the other founding members were his competitors – and watched its development with interest. He started attending NCBC in 1999 and, deciding the organization was viable and important to the industry, he joined in January 2000 as Member #53.

Bruce has held a variety of positions within the BCA. He was elected to the Northwest Chapter Board eight years ago, and later became a liaison to the International Board. Then he was elected and spent two full terms (plus an extra year) as the first Northwest Regional Representative to the Board.

So, according to Bruce, before lunch on the day he was elected BCA Treasurer he thought it would be an easy job. During lunch he and other Executive Committee

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members were told that PECL, heretofore the BCA's managing entity, planned to reorganize. BCA's Executive Committee immediately went to work creating Liz Fischer's job description as the new BCA Executive Director, along with bylaws and other requirements to become a fully self-managed association. New policies, procedures, an official Finance Committee and new reporting structures resulted from the change... not an easy job, but masterfully handled!

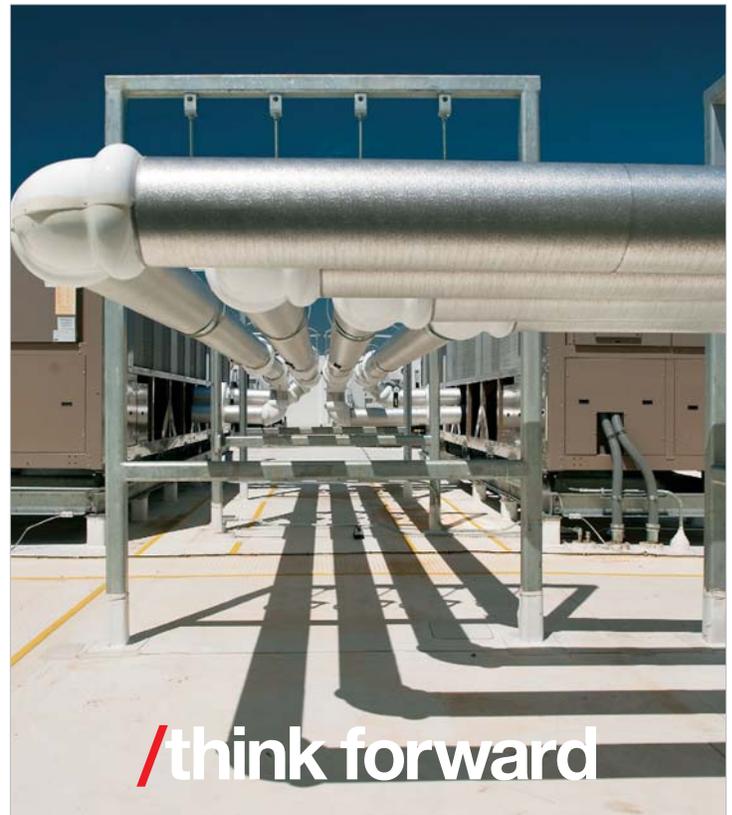
At the same time Bruce became increasingly engaged in BCA training, worked on the Best Practices Committee to develop the EBCx Best Practice and the NBCx Best Practice. He and Craig Hawkins teamed to modify the Existing Building Commissioning training program, initially developed for New York City, for delivery across North America. Bruce and Craig took the 3-day EBCx seminar "on the road" to Virginia, Seattle, and Dallas in 2013 with more venues to follow this year.

Today, Bruce wants to do more teaching. He says, "I train the people at Wood Harbinger, which is still a mechanical/electrical engineering company. I use my Cx experience to train people to do better design, bringing design staff out into the field to get hands on experience making equipment work right." He has proposed working with the Seattle 2030 District Plan whose goal is to reduce existing building energy use to 50% of a baseline set at 2012. To help achieve that goal, Bruce is proposing a BCA EBCx class for owners, large portfolio property managers and others.

Bruce says he "works both sides of the fence." He still manages design projects and hires commissioning providers. He feels that it helps to know as much about commissioning as the guy he's hiring – and it helps them to deliver. He says, "Problem solving is at the heart of every commissioning provider... teaching and learning to build teams, getting people to work together to deliver a quality project to the owner... that's what I live for, and that's what our work is all about. It's important to take the confrontational nature out of construction and build teamwork. Get involved early working with the owner, design team and contractor to build team relationship within the entire project, team-makers to find solutions. And stick with

the facts, find out what issues are, what will correct them, and move on."

Looking at today's market, Bruce believes that owners still are challenging, and need to be taught the value of commissioning. There is more buy-in from general contractors these days, and they are becoming advocates ensuring that they and the owners get the most for their money.



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## 2013 Annual Meeting and Dinner

Bruce Pitts as Slim in Three Cowboys Commission  
the BCA Annual Meeting



### Here are some words of wisdom from Bruce Pitts:

- The best aspect of being a BCA member is that we're competitors who get together to improve the industry.
- The value is in the involvement. You can get a wide breadth of experience talking with people who do what you're doing. We may be going after the same projects but we share knowledge.
- We need to start developing better dialogs with military services; there is a huge pool coming out of the service now who have good technical training that can adapt easily. We should help to get them tied in with a good company that values Cx – they are probably the biggest pool of newcomers we can convert easily and cost effectively.
- The EBCx training program needs to find the "dormant areas," break into organizations that have building operators and train them to become Cx people.

What does Bruce do for fun? He spent his kids' childhood coaching soccer for 20 years and is a huge soccer fan. He says, "From that I learned how to be a better manager. Coaching teenagers will teach you a lot! If you learn to do that you can be a very good manager – they teach you the realities of communication. I learned most of my management skills from coaching teenagers and having successful teams. And I'm an avid golfer – anytime I can sneak out and have a couple of hours on the golf course, I do."

So, Bruce – when might that time to sneak out for golf happen in your busy life?

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