



# IRMCA REPORT

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Unlike many paving experts, **Jack Lavardiere** sees the future in both black and white.

The owner of **Lavardiere Construction**, a highway and heavy industrial builder that operates its own asphalt plant, purchased a small concrete plant in 2001. A decade later, he made an even deeper commitment with the acquisition of a larger plant in Beardstown.



“Jack saw real potential in concrete,” says **Herschel Swan**, the seasoned general manager Lavardiere brought in soon after buying the Beardstown operation. “His goal was to meet growing demand for concrete paving and many other industrial and commercial applications.”

Since then, Lavardiere’s new enterprise – known as **LCI Concrete** – has grown from 5 to 27 employees and expanded its fleet to 19 trucks. In 2013 the company opened a new 12-acre plant in Macomb, more than doubling production capacity. The facility also houses a concrete lab that performs air, slump and core compression tests daily to assure consistent quality for customers across LCI’s growing service area.

## Longer-lasting concrete roads

Interest in concrete paving has grown steadily as the cost differential between concrete and asphalt has narrowed. Lavardiere’s strong partnerships with **IDOT** and the **City of Macomb** offered early opportunities for LCI, Swan says.

“City officials agree with us that whitetopping is an excellent choice for local streets,” he explains. “They’re always open to alternate bids, and we feel they’re building a better infrastructure in the process.”



LCI has worked on several whitetopping projects for Macomb, starting with University Drive in 2011 and one year later, a busy section of Charles Street.

The success of these jobs led to a major project in Astoria last year, where **United Contractors Midwest** rebuilt a main street that stretched the full length of the city. LCI produced 15,000 yards from a portable plant installed near the site, one of 2 mobile plants the company deploys as needed. “On our busiest day in Astoria, we delivered 1,500 yards in 9 hours,” Swan reports.

## Leveraging state and local funds

**Eric Moe**, Vice President and Division Manager for **McClure Engineering Associates**, also sees more paving jobs going from black to white as decision-makers embrace the long-term benefits of concrete.

Moe has worked with Swan and LCI on several road projects, many funded by job-creation initiatives like IDOT’s Economic Development Program. “Macomb voters also passed a local sales tax earmarked for community development and improvements, which is another source of funding for infrastructure projects,” he says.

As Motor Fuel Tax dollars decline, there’s a clear need to build roadways that last longer, Moe says. “This puts us in a strong position to recommend concrete.”



## Parking and agricultural applications

Faced with soaring maintenance costs, many business owners are rebuilding parking areas with concrete. LCI has seen recent growth in parking jobs, delivering 6,000 yards for the whitetopping of a **Farm King** parking lot in Macomb last year with a similar project starting soon in Monmouth. “Both jobs were black-to-white conversions, and we’re pleased the owners were open to concrete,” Swan says.

Local farmers represent another new market. LCI is working with the **Illinois Department of Agriculture** on specs for a steel-fiber-enriched concrete mix for hog barn floors.

“These are 50,000- to 60,000-square-foot spaces where durability really counts,” says Swan. “We hope to gain IDOA approval and win our first bid soon.”

## Delivering quality every day – whatever the weather

Building a thriving concrete business means being ready for every challenge. That’s why LCI has invested in state-of-the-art lab and production facilities, Swan says.

The company’s lab features a cure room that operates at 100% humidity and compression equipment that can break cylinders of up to 12,000 psi. “Continuous testing helps us stay on top of chemical additive dosages and assure consistency of aggregates and sand,” Swan explains. “As a result, we receive fewer callbacks than many of our competitors.”

Since year-round construction is the new normal, both LCI plants are fully enclosed. The Macomb location features radiant-heat floors and infrared heat overhead. “Last winter we were able to deliver mixes at 68 degrees ambient temperature, even when outside temps were in the single digits,” Swan reports. Dual venting keeps equipment and materials cool in summer.



## Focused partnerships yield opportunity

LCI’s approach of working with local partners who’ve shown a strong interest in concrete construction is a winning strategy, says IRMCA Technical Consultant **John Albinger**.

“This is something we recommend for all IRMCA members,” Albinger says. “Pick a partner or two in your region and concentrate your efforts on promoting concrete together. When you complete an innovative project and can show success, others will be interested, too – leading to even more opportunities.”

IRMCA is ready to help, Albinger adds. “We’re here to help every member company promote its capabilities and sell more concrete. When you’re working on partnerships and new projects, call on us anytime for ideas and support.”



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**CONCRETE IDEAS | Randell Riley, P.E.**



## NO QUESTIONS ASKED?

Last Thanksgiving I went to one of my local big box stores to exchange parts for one of my many weekend projects. I was second in line at the service counter, close enough to overhear the customer, who was returning one of those large deep fryers generally used for cooking turkeys. It was fully assembled and, though clean, had clearly been used.

She claimed the cooker “did not meet [her] needs.” The clerk gave her a skeptical look, but put the transaction through anyhow, handing her a full cash refund.

Which made me think: Try doing that with a load of concrete!

For good or ill, experiences like these have changed the way consumers think and act – a trend that’s making its way into the concrete business.

**As an engineer serving ACPA and IRMCA members**, I often find myself acting as the “responsible party of last resort.” A phone call comes in from a property owner whose new patio has a bird bath, a mottled, colored appearance or some light map cracking. The customer is searching for advice, and I try to be sympathetic. Sometimes the call comes from an attorney – an even tougher situation to handle.

The growing number of these calls doesn’t mean we’re letting quality slip. Instead, I think it’s a sign that customers expect more and more from us – even as they push us to deliver at the lowest possible cost.

This mindset affects commercial building and public works projects, too. Remember how rough concrete roads used to be? This was an accepted norm. Now we're tightening specifications to the point that we're asking, "How smooth is smooth enough?"

**Setting realistic expectations** can make a world of difference for you as a producer. Teaching customers up front what to anticipate can minimize callbacks down the road. We need to be clear that we do not necessarily produce a perfectly uniform-looking product.

Performance-related specifications that tie lack of uniformity to payment are creeping in to concrete production. This won't be an easy transition for some. Mother Nature provides many of our raw materials, including sand and aggregates. It's hard to assure perfect "six-sigma" quality control over what she gives us.

I do not think we can change the views of customers who expect perfection or instant refunds. But we do need to take full responsibility for quality and customer education.

**Keeping in mind that we are slowly moving** into an era of performance-related specifications, in the next few issues I'll touch on statistical anomalies I've encountered in my 30-plus years and guide you to tools and studies that can help. If you have stories or examples that will help your fellow concrete producers, I hope you'll share them. Let's see how we can prepare ourselves for folks who want to return that truckload of concrete 6 weeks later, no questions asked.

*Randell Riley is the Executive Director and Engineer for the American Concrete Paving Association's Illinois Chapter and a consultant working with IRMCA members on the day-to-day building of partnerships to promote long-life, quality concrete pavements. He can be reached at 217-793-4933 or [pccman@ilacpa.com](mailto:pccman@ilacpa.com).*

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## UPCOMING EVENTS

### **Board Meeting**

Sept. 2, 6 p.m.

*Jonah's Seafood House, East Peoria*

### **2014 Golf Outing**

Sept. 3, 11 a.m.

*Pine Lakes Golf Club, Washington*

### **Board Meeting**

Nov. 20, 10 a.m.

*Central Illinois Regional Airport, Bloomington*

### **Short Course**

Jan. 5-6, 2015

*Par\*A\*Dice Hotel, East Peoria*

### **Spring Meeting**

Mar. 25-28, 2015

*Naples Beach Hotel & Golf Club*

*Naples Beach, FL*



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## POLICY UPDATE

*By Jim Randolph, IRMCA Governmental Activities Chair*

Here's our review of current Illinois legislation that may affect our industry. We encourage you to reach out to local lawmakers with your views. Questions? Contact us anytime at [irmca@irmca.org](mailto:irmca@irmca.org).

### **HB5369 – Road Construction Bids**

Provides that bids for State or federally funded road construction contracts shall include transportation costs itemized apart from the cost of goods or materials transported. Sponsored by Rep. Luis Arroyo (D-Chicago). Has been re-referred to the House Rules Committee. | **IRMCA position: Oppose**

### **HB2367 – Road Closures and SB3471 -- Companion Bill**

Provides that highway commissioners may not permanently close, vacate, or reduce the weight limit on any road or portion thereof without the written approval of themselves, the county superintendent of highways, and the elected board associated with that road district. Effective immediately. This bill has passed committee and is on the calendar for 2nd reading. | **IRMCA position: Support both bills**

### **Workers Comp Bills**

**HB3736, HB3737 and HB3739** are sitting in Rules Committee with no activity since November 2013.

**HB3740, HB4189 and SB 2622, 2623, 2624, 2625, and 2626** are bills sponsored by Rep. Dwight Kay (R-Edwardsville) and Sen. Kyle McCarter (R-Decatur), which seek to reform and tighten Illinois workers compensation laws. They deal with specific issue such as pre-existing medical conditions, determination of partial disability, carpal tunnel, payment of benefits from a defined schedule and other key issues.

### **HB4383 – Towing Procedure**

Provides that any tow initiated by a law enforcement agency or officer shall be communicated by the law enforcement agency directly to the tow company by phone or computer. Provides that law enforcement officers shall allow the owner of a disabled vehicle to specify the tow company of the owner's choice if the vehicle requires towing but is not, in the opinion of the officer, obstructing traffic. | **IRMCA position: Support**

### **HB4384/SB2927 – Repeal CDF Fee**

Sent to committee and waiting. | **IRMCA position: Support**

#### **HB4420 – Earned Sick Time Act**

This bill would create the Earned Sick Time Act, providing that all employers with 20 or more employees shall provide paid sick time to their employees. Requires a minimum of one hour of paid sick time for every 40 hours worked by an employee, whether full-time or part-time, with a minimum of 2 days' paid sick time per calendar year. Amends the State Mandates Act to require implementation without reimbursement. Effective immediately. Currently held in rules committee. | **IRMCA position: Oppose**

#### **SB1825 – Towing Commercial Vehicles**

Prohibits a towing service from performing removal of a commercial motor vehicle under that vehicle's own power without the authorization of a law enforcement officer, the prohibition on "towing" a commercial motor vehicle by operating the vehicle under its own power as opposed to physically hauling the vehicle without the authorization of a law enforcement officer to the Section on unlawful practices by a commercial vehicle relocater. This bill has passed the Senate and is sitting in the House Rules Committee.

#### **SB3321 – Failure to Pay**

Provides that failure to pay a fine for a violation of any statute, not just traffic violations, on a conviction entered on or after the effective date of this amendatory Act will prevent the issuance, renewal, reissue, or reinstatement of driving privileges. Assigned to the Senate Transportation Committee.

#### **SB3574 -- Weight Variance for Natural Gas Trucks Passes Committee**

Legislation initiated by the Illinois Trucking Association to provide a 2,000-pound weight variance for natural gas- powered trucks was unanimously approved in the Senate Revenue Committee. This bill, sponsored by Sen. Martin Sandoval (D-Chicago), would allow for LNG or CNG fueled trucks to exceed weight limits by 2,000-pounds. Similar legislation was passed in Indiana and Ohio in 2013 and in Virginia earlier this year. The bill will now receive full Senate consideration in Illinois.

#### **NEW FEDERAL REGULATION on DOT Physicals**

As of May 2014, all doctors who intend to perform DOT physicals will have to pass an extensive certification process. As a result, many physicians will no longer perform DOT physicals. Learn more [here](#).

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