

# Dale Biggers: Epitome of a Gentleman, a Passion for the Pile Driving Industry

Positive adjectives abound when people in the deep foundations industry describe Dale Biggers, a vice president at Boh Bros., a 108-year-old firm based in Louisiana. Fred Fuchs, vice president of the Piling and Marine Division at Boh, calls Biggers a responsible man committed to learning and teaching, one who “keeps the ship in the right direction.” Ron Brylski, senior project manager at Boh, calls Biggers a “consummate” pile driver and an “unbelievable mentor.”

Biggers was born and bred in New Orleans, and attended Tulane University, where he studied mathematics and economics. He graduated from Tulane with a B.S. in mathematics, but decided the subject was “too theoretical.” A conversation with a friend whose father was dean of civil engineering convinced him to stay in college and get a second B.S. in civil engineering. After graduation, another conversation with a friend led him to answer an ad run by Boh Bros. They hired him despite his draft status (the war in Vietnam was underway) and he spent only three months with the company before going to Navy boot camp at Great Lakes Naval Station in Illinois and then on to U.S. Coast Guard Officer Candidate School. However, in that brief time at Boh, he met Ralph Junius, who impressed young Biggers as a “genius” and probably reinforced his decision to return to Boh Bros. after his time in the Reserve. He was also impressed, he says, by the firm’s “impeccable” reputation.

The weather on the Great Lakes was markedly different from that in New Orleans. Nonetheless, Biggers thought Milwaukee and Madison were “wonderful.” (He also met his future wife in Wisconsin.) He spent about three years as a marine inspector in the Coast Guard performing inspections on 560 ft (170 m) long ore boats that, collectively, had an average age of 48 years.

## Christmas Bonus

The first Christmas while in the Coast Guard, Biggers was amazed because Boh Bros. sent him a Christmas bonus based on his three months of employment despite not knowing if he would return after his three years in the service. As things turned out, that modest bonus was a great investment for the firm.

Biggers has had a rewarding career at Boh, and is now a vice president. He began

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working in the field, going to different jobs, meeting people and learning. “Learning” is a key word in Biggers’ vocabulary. Boh Bros., he says, drives piles and builds docks from Tampa to Corpus Christi and along the Mississippi River. Driven piles work well in the South, he adds. One memorable small job he worked on was driving piles for lighting an athletic field where he had played baseball as a boy.

A much larger memorable project was the New Orleans Aquarium. Boh’s workers dealt with 20 in (508 mm) diameter pipe piles driven 120 ft (36.6 m). Then, another 120 ft (36.6 m) was spliced to the first piece, so that each pile was 240 ft (73.2 m) long. Some were battered, unusual for such piles, but the designers feared the possibility of scour that might undermine the structure. Boh Bros. was the low bidder for the \$2,152,000 job by only \$ 3,000.

The most important job for any company in New Orleans was helping the city recover after Hurricane Katrina. About 74 percent of the city was flooded, and Boh Bros. was the first to respond. They began by driving steel sheet piles across the canals to allow pumping to dewater the city. The



cooperation between Boh Bros., the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and private engineering firms was remarkable, he says. At one early meeting with the head of a local engineering firm, Biggers said, “Ralph, your shirt is on inside out.” To which Ralph replied, “You’re lucky – that’s the cleanest side.” There was no time for niceties, recalls Biggers. Boh employees worked two 12-hour shifts seven days a week, not knowing in many cases for weeks what happened to their families. This was one of Boh’s finest hours, he says.

## International Building Code (IBC)

Biggers was the chair of the task force for the IBC revisions, a three-year effort that involved monthly meetings of a 35-member committee – structural engineers, geotechnical engineers and contractors from across the country. Lori Simpson, P.E., principal and vice president at Langan Engineering, and Garland Likins, P.E., GRL/Pile Dynamics, both served on the committee. Simpson describes Biggers as “very bright, funny and generous.” He was also fair, good at soliciting input and organized. He kept us on track, she says.

Likins has more to say. He considers Biggers a “true gentleman,” and ranks him at the very top of the list of his many friends in the engineering profession. He adds that Biggers is “able technically and excels in his communication skills. More important, he is an impartial evaluator, a necessary quality in revising the codes and standards.”

## DFI Benefits

Biggers believes that one of the major benefits of being on a DFI Technical Committee or Working Group is connecting with others, getting to know people on a deeper level. After a few years, he says, you can “learn a lot” from others, about new technologies and other subjects. DFI, he adds, is a great place to help teach younger people, which he enjoys. Biggers is the chair of the 2017 DFI Annual Conference on Deep Foundations to be held in New Orleans from October 24-27. One reason he accepted this job was his admiration of the DFI staff. According to Biggers, work on the October event is on schedule or maybe even ahead of it.

Boh Bros. is an exceptional place to work says Biggers, and others concur, while noting Biggers’ high level of capabilities. Harold Baur, a senior project manager, says Biggers is “one of the most dedicated, loyal and honest men I know,” citing Biggers’ patience and fairness. Baur says Biggers has a “knowledge base for our line of work that far surpasses anyone else’s.” Biggers works every weekend, says Baur, and is the “father figure” for the younger staff. He “provides advice and solutions for work and life.” Ron Brylski, a senior project manager, agrees, calling Biggers a pile driving icon, a man of “experience, skill and professional integrity,” who “loves sharing his knowledge and passion for the pile driving industry.”

## German Connection

Biggers’ wife, Virgene, studied German literature at the graduate level at the University of Tubingen in Germany. There, she established friendships with German classmates who sent their children to New

Orleans to live with the Biggers family. They have hosted 12 students 14 times, not through a formal exchange program but from the network of friends.

Virgene Biggers was a court reporter and is the U.S. representative of the National Court Reporting Association to Intersteno, an international federation for office technology and shorthand. The Biggers travel often to the group’s conference sites in European cities, most recently to Zagreb, Croatia. The Biggers’ daughter, Eva, also has a unique career. She has a degree in hotel management from Niagara University and is now a sommelier in Napa Valley, Calif.

Dale Biggers is a fortunate individual. He is admired by his peers, thoroughly enjoys his work, and is very good at it.

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