

# Morgan NeSmith: Honesty, Humor and a Tenacious Work Ethic



Willie and Morgan NeSmith

When Morgan NeSmith was young, he had a role model at hand: his father, Willie, was a geotechnical consultant. When he asked his father for some help getting a summer job, the younger NeSmith was steered in a direction quite different from that of working at a soda shop or its equivalent. His dad helped him get a job in the materials testing lab at the consultancy for which he worked. Dheepa Bhate, the now owner of Building and Earth Sciences, was his first boss.

By the time NeSmith entered Georgia Institute of Technology, he had already spent two summers working in the lab. He says he had always “been into” math and sciences, but it seemed that his career path was established. At Georgia Tech, he was in a work-study program, alternating quarters between study and work. He went on to earn his M.S. degree in geotechnical engineering, also at Georgia Tech.

James Frost was NeSmith’s professor while at Georgia Tech, and says there were several Morgans. First was “the Inquisitive Morgan.” Frost says this Morgan’s questions were the ones that made one

pause before responding. “They reached beyond conventional ideas,” Frost says, adding, “We should all have a Morgan around when we are in need of some honest, humorous, curiosity.”

## Working Overseas

NeSmith worked for Fugro for seven years after finishing graduate school, and this experience impressed him deeply. He worked for Fugro-Suhaimi in Saudi Arabia for two years and for Fugro Engineers in Leidschendam, the Netherlands, for five years, where he worked on offshore and nearshore projects in West Africa and Southwest Asia. Azerbaijan was a favorite workplace, he says, to which he frequently traveled and where he helped establish Fugro’s local soil testing laboratory.

NeSmith says he is motivated by travel. He loved working abroad; the mix of cultures fascinates him. He found the experience exciting, especially, he says, for a single, young man. The “inter-mix” of cultures continues to fascinate him. Married now, he and his wife, Rebecca, travel as much as they can, most recently to Bolivia.

## Corporate Climb

While NeSmith was living in the Netherlands, his father, Willie, became chief geotechnical engineer for Berkel & Company Contractors. NeSmith joined Berkel in 2004, where he climbed the corporate ladder to the position of director of engineering, where he now heads the corporate engineering group. Berkel is a national design-build geotechnical contractor with its corporate office and equipment manufacturing facility near Kansas City, and eight regional offices and equipment yards across the U.S. Berkel is the largest installer of auger pressure grouted (APG) piles in the U.S., and has installed a large quantity of drilled displacement (DD) piles, as well. He notes that European engineers have been doing drilled displacement for many years, while U.S. engineers have only been doing so since the late 1990s.

APG piles are a type of augered cast-in-place (ACIP) piles. ACIP pile is the general industry term in the U.S., and APG piles are the most common type of ACIP pile.

Jason K. Fox, vice president of Berkel & Company, began his career together with NeSmith. He is amazed that “all the big ideas we had as junior-level guys have come to fruition. We talked about one day being a design-build, full service contractor. NeSmith’s tireless efforts spent educating our clients and consultants about our capabilities continue to play a vital role in our success.”

NeSmith describes his “forte” as being able to look at a set of foundation plans, and asking himself, along with others on the project, “Do we have a better idea? What else can we do that might improve cost-effectiveness,” for example. He is a fan of design-build construction, and sees the method as getting the most efficiency from each specialist. NeSmith says he doesn’t directly make money for Berkel; when the drillers on the road implement those ideas, then the “checks come in.”

## Work Ethic and Quick Wit

Alan Roach, president and CEO of Berkel, says NeSmith has been a “tremendous asset to Berkel as director of engineering, citing his tenacious work ethic and quick wit,” saying those traits have played a big part in continuing to expand the firm’s design-build capabilities. Greg Righter, a colleague since graduate school at Georgia Tech, echoes the comments on NeSmith’s sense of humor, saying he was the “most entertaining guy back in college.” He adds that NeSmith continues to “carry on the Berkel mission to advance APG piles for the industry as a whole.”

## Other Honors

Dan Brown, president of Dan Brown and Associates and current president of DFI, awarded NeSmith with a President’s Award at the 2017 DFI Annual Conference on Deep Foundations in New Orleans. Brown said, in part, that NeSmith was being recognized for his efforts to lead the productive and successful ACIP Pile Technical Committee through activities such as organizing workshops and conducting the ACIP pile installation, monitoring, testing and extraction program in Florida. Brown thanked NeSmith for “always being willing to say yes to helping out with a DFI project or event.”

NeSmith likes and admires the people he has come to know through DFI meetings and conferences. DFI helps him stay on top. “There’s no better place to be,” he says. NeSmith talks about “hitting one’s stride” and says many people fear “stepping out.” He seems to lack that fear, and to have hit his stride very early.

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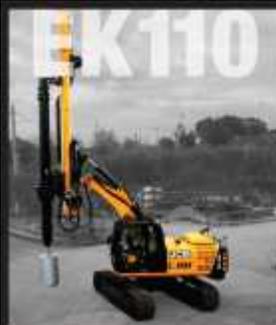


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