

# NCMCA Golden Anniversary Celebration Series – March 2024

2024-03-25

We're starting off the North Carolina Masonry Contractors Association Golden 50th Anniversary Year by highlighting some monumental events that have taken place throughout the existence of NCMCA. Each month throughout 2024 we will have articles that will showcase the history and folks that helped NCMCA get to where it is today. Please enjoy this yearlong series with our third article, "The Hired Help"

It's a major challenge for most organizations to move beyond fully volunteer management and step up to retaining dedicated "paid" management and administration. Most organizations find they are limited in growth, function and opportunity if they rely solely on volunteers to function. Many of our sister masonry contractor and masonry promotional groups continue to struggle with making the leap to paid management. Funding and finding the right candidate or management firm are major hurdles.

NCMCA was officially incorporated with the North Carolina Secretary of State in 1974, the anniversary we are celebrating this year. Even before the incorporation, a dedicated group of volunteers were devoting extraordinary time and resources to making a masonry contractors association a reality for North Carolina. Soon after incorporation, the leadership of the new organization began to realize the limitations of depending solely on volunteers.

Unfortunately, the details are sketchy but in the mid-seventies, the young NCMCA made the move away from volunteer administration. Here is the history of the Association's executives.

**Eleanor F. Upton/Upton Associates – 1976 to 1997** President Robert "Bob" Merrill's administration contracted with Upton Associates of Raleigh for management services in 1976. Mrs. Upton would serve as NCMCA Executive Secretary until the fall of 1997, assisted by her husband Bob, who specialized in newsletters, other publications, and office computer technology. Upton Associates' staff handled bookkeeping, billing and membership management.

Eleanor and Bob Upton formed Upton Associates, a meeting and association management firm, in 1976. Utilizing her contacts and extensive experience in the hospitality industry, she arranged spectacular events and conventions for NCMCA and the now-defunct Southeast Masonry Association at great resort venues across the Carolinas. (Upton Associates also did minor management tasks for the Southeast Masonry Association, a group that many masonry companies from the Carolinas, Virginia and the southeast participated in before the Mason Contractors Association of America in the late nineties began to embrace the “open shop” companies that prevailed in the southeast.) Eleanor’s Rolodex held the contact information for every hotel, resort, convention center, visitor’s bureau, bus company, and talent agency on the east coast. She was on a “first name” basis with all of them.

With their broad experience managing multiple trade and professional groups and their many contacts in state government and politics, Bob and Eleanor were a valued resource for guiding NCMCA in its growth and influence.

Past President Bob Merrill once said, “It was a big change in the association when we hired Eleanor. It was an important move for us. NCMCA wouldn’t have still existed if we hadn’t hired her. It would have folded.”

At the February 1998 Annual Convention, which was held in conjunction with the national Masonry Expo/Mason Contractors Association of America Convention in downtown Charlotte, Mrs. Upton was recognized for her years of dedicated service to the Association as she stepped away from managing NCMCA. President Doug Burton presented her with a commemorative Waterford Crystal bowl and announced her to be the recipient of the 1998 NCMCA “Outstanding Associate’s Award,” which from that time on, would be renamed and known as the “Eleanor F. Upton Award.” In her honor, with the assistance of John Cramer and Doug Burton, master stonemason William “Smitty” Smith restored the historic stone fireplace and mantel in the sacristy of the Upton’s church, Christ Episcopal Church in Raleigh. John Cramer says, “The fireplace was originally built in the church in 1848, pre-civil war, and to this day carries a plaque commemorating Eleanor.”

Quoted in the August 1997 NCMCA newsletter, Burton said of Eleanor, “Masonry contractors in North Carolina owe her more than we can ever repay. She has made it

possible for the association to become a real force in the building industry and the community of this state. We are now recognized as one of the strongest masonry contractor associations in the nation.”

Eleanor Upton died in June 2017 following husband Bob’s passing in April 2016. Their daughter Barbara Geiger continues to run the firm. Over the years, Upton Associates has continued to assist NCMCA in arranging favorable convention contracts and venues.

**Lynn Nash – 1997 to 2023** By the mid-nineties, NCMCA leadership began to realize that while Upton Associates’ services had served the Association well, future growth and expansion of NCMCA projects and programs would require fulltime management and at least one fulltime employee. Under the leadership of then President Doug Burton, a plan was developed to fund the new executive office with pledges from individual member firms and local chapters. Chapters each committed to a \$2,000 annual pledge for five years, which several greatly exceeded. (The chapter pledge commitment remains active today with chapter contributions exceeding well over a half-million dollars.) In addition, thirty-one member firms also committed to a five-year pledge that exceeded \$215,000 in contributions to support a fulltime office.

A search committee was formed consisting of Doug Burton, Alan Griffin, Gary Joyner, David Sigmon, and Freddy Koontz, and a job description was developed. Résumé solicitation and interviews got underway in 1997. After interviewing several qualified candidates, Lynn Nash of Hickory was hired as NCMCA Executive Vice President to become the Association’s first fulltime managing director beginning September 15, 1997.

A Virginian, Nash grew up in a masonry family and worked in the concrete and masonry materials industry beginning in the mid-seventies. He also had background in media and broadcasting from previous employment and experience. Nash had been an associate member of NCMCA’s Western Carolina Chapter beginning with his transfer to Hickory from Roanoke in 1979.

Nash likes to relate the story about how excited he was on that August 12th when he accepted the NCMCA position, only to wake up that same night in a panic facing the reality “that NCMCA didn’t have enough money to pay me for three months.” Now he

says, “Twenty-six years later, we know the rest of the story. Happy ending.”

Upon Nash’s May 2023 retirement, Past President Doug Burton, reflecting in the NCMCA quarterly newsletter, wrote, “Lynn has pushed, prodded, persevered and ultimately survived fourteen presidents during his tenure. Half of those beat him to retirement. We hired him with \$35,000 in the bank; he leaves us with \$1,200,000. Lynn was instrumental in getting our certification program started, which is now in its (17th) year and is the envy of the nation. He saw the need and was very involved in pushing us towards hiring a workforce development person and was part of the process to find, hire and train Ryan (Shaver.) (Nash) was apolitical, staying above and out of the fray that industry associations experience and kept it at bay. He was a strong proponent and voice for masonry and contractors. He ran a tight ship. His conventions were well done, enlightening and enjoyed by all. He advanced our association and our industry and represented us well at the national level. Lynn retired after our 2023 convention and has left us in great shape with strong programs in place and a firm direction for the future.”

Nash and wife Katie are enjoying retirement in Hickory. He’s still a regular at Western Carolina Chapter meetings.

**Ryan Shaver – 2018 to Present** Until about 1999, the lion’s share of masonry workforce recruitment in the Carolinas had been by the block and brick manufacturing industry, especially the brick manufacturers. With people like the late Jack Glass working the state, the North Carolina Brick Association (later to become the Carolinas Brick Association) maintained staff positions dedicated to masonry workforce development, especially in high schools. Nash recalls that in 1997 when he joined NCMCA, North Carolina had about 120 high school masonry vocational classes in place, most as a result of the Carolinas Brick Association and the early efforts of folks like Jack Glass.

With industry changes, especially ownership consolidation, those dedicated brick association workforce development positions disappeared by the late nineties. By the early two thousands, the lack of the brick industry’s traditional shepherding of school masonry programs was becoming apparent. While the need to restore systematic (versus what had become hit-or-miss) oversight of school programs was recognized, no serious industry effort was made to develop and fill a position dedicated to

masonry workforce development until about 2017.

In 2017, the possibility arose to bring on an individual who was extraordinarily and uniquely qualified to address workforce development at all levels. Ryan Shaver of Mount Pleasant, North Carolina was an award winning masonry student himself, having won the North Carolina State Fair Masonry Apprentice Contest in 1992 and the National VICA Masonry Championship in 1993, and was a successful journeyman mason at a very young age. He had experience in running masonry crews and later, owned and managed his own company and acquired his general contractor's license. When his award-winning mentor and high school masonry instructor Doug Drye retired, Ryan became a very successful masonry instructor at Mount Pleasant High School, producing state and national champions of his own. He was a finalist for Cabarrus County "Teacher-of-the-Year" in 2014. After teaching, he gained additional useful experience promoting and demonstrating innovative masonry products all across the country with Johnson Concrete/Stalite. They allowed Ryan freedom to promote and recruit young people to masonry careers, including the first ever "Masonry Education Day" at Stalite's Ben Ketchie Park in 2016.

At the January 2018 NCMCA Board of Directors Meeting, then president-elect Kent Huntley, very much aware of the important opportunity presenting itself, successfully proposed that NCMCA create the position, interview, and hire an NCMCA Workforce Development & Training Coordinator. President Bob Gates appointed Kent Huntley, Greg Huntley, Cliff McGee, Bo Black, Calvin Brodie, Danks Burton, Doug Burton, Gary Joyner, and Lynn Nash to the search committee. In February, President Gates announced that Ryan Shaver had accepted the position and would begin employment on March 1, 2018.

History repeated itself. To fund the expense of the new staff position, which was to about double NCMCA's annual budget, member firms and local chapters again committed to yearly pledges. NCMCA successfully applied for multiple grants from the newly created MCAA Masonry Foundation in excess of \$105,000.00. Once again, NCMCA "found a way to do it."

With his broad experience and extensive contacts, Ryan needed little training and began living up to President Bob Gates' "MAD" motto of "Make a Difference" practically from day one. As Ryan would say, he'd been preparing for this role his

whole life.

As NCMCA's Workforce Development & Training Coordinator, Ryan quickly developed new programs and pushed existing programs to new levels and effectiveness, including creation of a new groundbreaking pre-apprentice program for high school students. School programs immediately benefited from receiving the renewed attention and encouragement from the masonry industry as coordinated by Shaver. Ryan successfully lobbied for a training trailer. NCMCA's mobile training unit became the envy of workforce development programs in other states. NCMCA's commitment to workforce development quickly drew interest from across the country with Ryan in demand for speaking engagements and workshop appearances all over. Student and apprentice competitions in North Carolina and beyond have benefited from the dedicated management and coordination that Ryan provides. Shaver found ways to maintain momentum even during the difficult COVID-19 years.

Ryan's list of workforce achievements is extensive and just barely covered in this article. It is not an exaggeration to suggest that very few groups have equaled NCMCA's ongoing success in promoting and recruiting for careers in masonry.

When then Executive Vice President Lynn Nash announced his plan to retire at age seventy, Ryan immediately expressed his interest in filling the position. Despite some leadership reservations about how such a staff change might negatively impact NCMCA's workforce development initiatives, there was general agreement that Ryan had earned the promotion and would do well as the association's manager. On the recommendation of the Future Staff Committee, consisting of members Calvin Brodie, Tim Manning, Gary Joyner, Bo Black, Cliff McGee, Kent Huntley, Bob Gates, and Lynn Nash, the board of directors approved the promotion in March 2022 and Ryan assumed the title of NCMCA Executive Vice President September 1, 2022. By the end of 2022, the NCMCA office and the administration of the association began the move from Hickory to a new office in Mount Pleasant.

Ryan will be seventy years old in 2045.

In fifty years, there have only been three NCMCA executive managers. Very few associations of any kind can make that claim. To their detriment, many groups suffer from a virtual "revolving door" of managers. It is perhaps a tribute not only to the

three individuals who have held the manager's position, but also a great tribute to NCMCA for providing a strong, supportive and stable partnership between staff and elected leadership. As Lynn Nash was often heard to say, "I've got the best job in the world."

Article Written by Lynn Nash

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NCMCA's first Executive Secretary Eleanor Upton with then-President Robert "Bob" Merrill. Mrs. Upton's firm, Upton Associates, was retained to manage NCMCA in 1976 when Mr. Merrill was president.

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At the 1998 NCMCA Convention in Charlotte, then-President Doug Burton along with past association presidents in attendance, recognized Eleanor Upton for her years of service to NCMCA and announced that henceforth, the “Outstanding Associates Award” would be renamed the “Eleanor F. Upton Award” in her honor.

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On his first day on the job, Lynn Nash (left) meets with Eleanor Upton and then-President Doug Burton in Upton Associates' Raleigh office as management transition takes place in September 1997.

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Then-President Bob Gates (right) welcomes Ryan Shaver on Ryan's first day as NCMCA's new Workforce Development & Training Coordinator, March 1, 2018. In 2022, Ryan replaced the retiring Lynn Nash as NCMCA Executive Vice President.

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