International Geo-Industry Conference in Brazil Focused on Themes of Interest to ADSC Members

By Gina Beim, P.E.

The Brazilian economy may not be growing at the same pace as it was three years ago, but its construction market is still worthy of attention. That explains the record numbers of attendees to COBRAMSEG 2014, which, from September 9-13, combined the 17th Soil Mechanics and Geotechnical Engineering Congress, the 7th Brazil-Portugal Congress on Geotechnics, the 6th Brazilian Symposium on Rock Mechanics, the 6th Brazilian Symposium for Young Geotechnical Engineers and an exhibit area. Recognizing the importance of the Brazilian event, the International Society of Soil Mechanics and Geotechnical Engineering, ISSMGE, chose to hold its worldwide directors meeting during the Congress.

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More than 1,500 geotechnical engineers, foundation contractors, students, academics and others, from around the world, were in attendance, along with 47 exhibitors. Nine different short courses were presented prior to the main event, and five hundred papers, covering a whole gamut of topics of interest to the ADSC community, were accepted for presentation in either poster or lecture format. A conference highlight was the Victor de Mello Lecture, delivered by geotechnical legend Dr. James Mitchell, who received a standing ovation when presenting Lessons from the Lives of Two Dams. Dr. Mitchell is an Honorary Emeritus ADSC Technical Affiliate Member.

Engineers from Brazilian foundations company Concremat teamed up with ADSC Associate Member, Pile Dynamics, Inc. and presented a paper detailing the Brazilian experience with Thermal Integrity Profiling. Other papers of interest to ADSC members included cases studies on drilled shaft and micropile construction challenges, on various soil mixing technologies for ground improvement, including the utilization of recycled materials and waste, and multiple papers on load testing – static, dynamic and bi-directional. Load testing was the focus of a round table chaired by Dr. Bengt Fellenius with the participation of prominent Brazilian geotechnical engineers. A common thread of the round table was the need for increased foundation quality control.

ADSC Associate Member, CZM Foundation Equipment was one of two Master Sponsors of the event. CZM presented a video and described its expansion into the U.S. during a “meeting with the industry” event. Director Marcos Cio showcased various CZM machines at job sites both in Brazil and in the USA. Marcos spotlighted the CZM EK180ES model (not available in the U.S.), for secant piles. Secant piles are a cost-efficient solution for underground structures such as basements and parking garages in tight urban construction sites. CZM’s beautifully decorated exhibit booth stood literally in the center of the exhibit area,

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next to a stage where, during the opening reception, participants enjoyed live entertainment.

Other ADSC members with a presence were Dywidag, Bauer, Fugro, Keller and, through its Brazilian representative, Pile Dynamics, Inc. Pile Dynamics was pleased with the exposure it gained at the event, and will probably continue to participate in future events with exhibit booths and/or paper presentations.

In an interview with the Brazilian Association of Soil Mechanics, Mauricio Sales, President of the COBRAMSEG organizing commission, could not determine in his own mind which aspect of the conference, that had the theme “Sustainable Infrastructure,” was the most successful. Having mentioned the quality of the presentations, the success of the exhibit and the remarkably fun “after hours” programming, he eventually decided that the participation of young engineers was the highlight. With a congress designed just for them, and incentives such as complimentary association membership and social events, young engineers came in large numbers, assuring Sales that there will be a strong future generation of professionals dedicated to geotechnical engineering. Independent of the country’s economic outlook we can be assured that construction will go on.

Gina Beim, P.E. is the sole proprietor of MCDA Consulting LLC. She serves as Marketing Director for ADSC Technical Affiliate Members Pile Dynamics, Inc., and GRL Engineers, Inc. and has collaborated with ADSC Associate Member CZM Foundation Equipment. Gina may be reached at gina.beim@mcda-consulting.com.

Conference photography provided courtesy of Didier Pinheiro. (Editor)

Six of the 47 exhibitors were ADSC members.