

# A Dream Career, Engineered

From civil engineering to education and training, Ryan Allin of GRL Engineers, Inc. couldn't be more grateful for his career



By Jess Campbell

It's been said that if you do what you love, you'll never work a day in your life. But with all the career paths one could take, how do you decide what sort of work won't ever feel like work?

Ryan Allin of Pile Dynamics Inc. in Cleveland, Ohio, simply had to step into a sewer.

"I went to Cleveland State; that's where I got my degree. I started in a co-op program there. My first job was with a municipal firm that works on sewers and culverts, etcetera. I started on that job and I absolutely hated it. I was like, 'If this is civil engineering, I don't want to do civil engineering!'"

Since 1997, Allin has been part of the Pile Dynamics Inc. team, working first for GRL Engineers Inc. as a co-op student then moving into field engineering and eventually working as a project engineer. His co-op experience was one he'll never forget and was arguably what would encourage him to spend his entire career with GRL and Pile Dynamics thus far.

"When I went there, they were designing all these products and doing all this research. They bring you in and listen to you and then say, 'Alright, that sounds like a good idea. Why don't you go try that?' They gave me the ability to experiment and learn and do new things. It really was something very different than what most engineers do." That kind of freedom and the ability to learn to do by doing remains a cornerstone of the way these two companies do business. "I really feel like, working with Pile Dynamics and GRL, you're very close to engineering. We really are developing and trying to improve an industry with the testing that we do."



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— Ryan Allin, GRL Engineers

◀ Ryan in his element, teaching in Boston, Mass.



Ryan at the Sydney Harbour after a two-day conference in downtown Sydney, Australia in September 2017



Making a quick stop in Bali after a training in Jakarta

### Knowledge is power

In 2012, the training demands at Pile Dynamics became paramount and a position was created to rectify those demands. Although the job involved responsibilities entirely different than what he had been doing, Allin decided to apply and was subsequently hired as the person responsible for the company's educational programming for foundation testing professionals. Despite what seemed like a huge leap of faith, Allin says moving from project engineering to training has helped him become a better engineer.

"It was a very big shift for me, going from something I was very comfortable doing day to day, to trying to teach it. I always tell people who come in to my seminars or for training that I didn't really understand what I was doing until I had to start teaching it to someone else. It really forces you to understand it and be prepared to answer questions."

Allin was given permission to develop his own collection of teaching material and resources which further helped him to truly understand not only his own work as an engineer, but also how to best break the material down and teach it to others. Ensuring his students walk away from his teachings with a new perspective – and stronger confidence – is what drives Allin to continue teaching. "The rewarding thing for me is that we do something very unique at Pile Dynamics and GRL. We have a skill set that, on a good day, you'd call a niche. But it's so much more than that. A lot of people view what we do as sort of like wizardry. The thing I like most about teaching is when you break these things down, people who've walked in like a deer in headlights walk out knowing, 'Hey, I can do this!' So, that's really the most rewarding thing for me, for people to walk out of a training session and have confidence that they're going to get good results and contribute to their industry."

### Growing forward

Allin is very quick to mention his mentors as he speaks about his career development and success. "Without question, Garland Likins has always been a mentor for me, and has always been there to offer opportunity. And Frank Rausche, too. They allow you to try. That's key. At a lot of places, protocol becomes so rigorous. Frank and Garland have always given professional leeway to go out

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and try new things and see how we do. I've always appreciated that so much because it's not an easy thing to do, to relinquish that kind of control and trust."

Allin also speaks well of the people and companies he has worked with as part of being a member of PDCA. "I like the fact that we're working with the contractors and that they see the benefit of testing. I've worked with a lot of quality contractors in my day. In particular, I think of Buck Darling with H.F. Darling. He's always been someone of the highest integrity to me and really sees the advantage of working with us. I just really enjoy working with the contractors, especially when they understand what we do and use that to their advantage. I think it's really a mutually beneficial relationship."

When he looks forward, Allin plans to continue down the path he's on, maintaining the quality of the testing industry and ensuring everyone is doing their best at their job; he truly is working in his dream career by doing so. Whether it's a training seminar at home base in Cleveland or a multi-day conference in Australia or Jakarta, to say Allin enjoys his work is a gross understatement. "The driven pile industry is pretty much my livelihood!" he said. "I've had so many 'Whoa!' moments. When I was a kid in high school and planning my life out, never in my wildest dreams did I ever think I'd be in these places. I've had several times where I'm like, 'I can't believe I'm doing this; this is not real.' It's a dream job situation, for sure."

For Ryan Allin, traveling, teaching and helping the driven pile industry to continuously improve and move forward will never be or feel like a job – and it definitely beats working in a sewer. ▼