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20 People to Know in Transportation and Infrastructure: Hota GangaRao, West Virginia University

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Hota GangaRao, director, Constructed Facilities Center, Wadsworth Professor, Wadsworth Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering, Benjamin M. Statler College of Engineering and Mineral Resources, West Virginia University

WEST VIRGINIA UNIVERSITY

By Ethan Lott – Data Editor, Pittsburgh Business Times
Jun 27, 2024

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Hota GangaRao, a professor at West Virginia University, teaches both undergraduate and graduate courses in structural engineering and conducts research in developing advanced materials and systems for civil infrastructure implementation. In addition to training the next generation of engineering students, GangaRao works with funding agencies and owners of infrastructure to implement new ideas after testing and evaluation in the lab.

What worries keep you up at night?

Lack of adequate funding to maintain aging infrastructure and inadequate public interest to advance the state-of-the-art infrastructure for future generations in terms of high-speed transportation, unmanned vehicle operations (and) advanced material usage for longer service life with minimal maintenance.

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SAVE MY SPOT

What have been the biggest changes to engineering in the civil, bridge and built environment during your career?

Advances are being made with use of FRP (Polymer) composite and hybrid (composites with conventional materials), use of high-strength concretes and high-strength steels, improvements in design and construction methods with emphasis on structural redundancy, (and) use of material awareness to minimize carbon emissions. But there is a chasm to cross between the advances being made by researchers and the implementors such as contractors and owners.

What do you see as the greatest opportunities regionally in transportation?

Implementation of high-speed train technologies for high-volume movement of people.

How are sustainability efforts changing your job and industry?

The civil engineering profession is somewhat risk averse. Even though sustainable materials like wood composites are not being implemented extensively at this point of time, these hybrid materials are gaining attention because of their sustainability, carbon sequestration, high strength-to-weight ratio with engineered woods exceeding the strength of concrete and reaching the strength of low-grade steel, ease of handling and product familiarity. Therefore, I am on my toes to retool myself to implement such sustainable materials on a demonstration basis, and we are gently nudging the infrastructure industry to implement them.

What do you think is the most amazing infrastructure achievement?

Amazing infrastructure achievements are in the areas of bridge building, (for instance) in China with complex bridge structures being built in less than a year using modular construction and bridges that are rotated about the vertical axis to accommodate moving sea vessels.

What attracted you to a career in engineering?

Solving challenging problems for the benefit of people and the joy in innovation and field implementation of my discoveries.

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