

PROFILE

Healy has design for more growth

By ANDREA DECKERT

Robert Healy was faced with a tall order when he answered a help wanted ad more than 25 years ago.

LaBella Associates DPC, the firm that posted the job for a director of architecture, was seeking a person who could transform the civil engineering firm into one that would be known for its architectural services as well.

Healy went to talk to the company leaders and ended up taking the job. He, along with one other employee, set out to create an architectural division.

"We began as a very small 'A' in a big 'E' company," Healy says, referring to architecture and engineering.

Healy not only accepted the challenge, he exceeded it.

When he began in 1990, LaBella employed 35 workers in Rochester. Today, LaBella maintains its Rochester headquarters and has over 470 employees at 15 locations, including 311 local employees.

Net revenue is \$46.7 million and work is nearly equally divided between architectural and engineering jobs, he says. LaBella climbed to No. 21 this year on the Rochester Chamber Top 100 list of fastest-growing private companies.

LaBella has grown in terms of revenue by some 20 percent annually over the past five years, organically and through acquisitions. In addition to its expertise in architecture and engineering, the company also offers environmental, planning, surveying and grant writing services.

LaBella Associates was founded in 1978 by professional engineer Salvatore LaBella. Today it is led by CEO Sergio Esteban.

It also has expanded its geographic footprint over the years, with six offices in New York as well as offices in North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Ohio and Madrid. There are also LaBella personnel in a client office in Maine.

LaBella ranked fourth on the most recent

Robert Healy, now president, joined LaBella Associates 25 years ago



Photo by Kimberly Simpson

Rochester Business Journal list of architectural firms and second on the most recent list of engineering firms.

Healy, 58, has served as LaBella's president since 2010. He is proud of the firm's growth and the employees who have helped shape the business.

"I get a lot of enjoyment from seeing the growth of our business and the growth of our employees," he says. "It's a privilege to be able to represent this company."

Irondequoit native

Healy grew up in west Irondequoit and attended Bishop Kearney High School. He liked to draw, so he took a mechanical drafting class that sparked his interest in architecture.

He attended SUNY College of Technology at Alfred where he received an associate of architectural technology degree in 1978. Healy then went to Syracuse University where he earned a bachelor of architecture degree in 1981. He then went to work for what is now the Pike Cos. Ltd., where he learned a great deal about architecture from the construction side of the business. He left Pike in 1986 to start his own firm with business partner Robert Monahan.

Healy ran the five-person firm on Culver Road with Monahan for nearly five years, where he specialized in religious facility design.

Ready to tackle larger projects, he contacted LaBella and joined the firm in August 1990. He immediately began to create an architectural presence for the business, growing it market by market.

Robert Healy

Position: president, LaBella Associates DPC

Age: 58

Education: Associate degree in architectural technology, SUNY College of Technology at Alfred, 1978; bachelor of architecture degree, Syracuse University, 1981

Family: Wife, Catharine; sons, Kyle, 28, and Jesse, 24; daughter, Samantha, 24

Residence: Pittsford

Activities: golfer, music enthusiast, New York Mets and Syracuse Orange fan

Quote: "It's a privilege to be able to represent this company."

LaBella's architectural department has completed projects in a range of markets, including education, arts and recreation, corporate and municipal, health care and religious facilities.

That architectural diversity has helped strengthen LaBella.

"It's helped us become a very strong company," Healy says.

Among notable local projects are the Bausch & Lomb Public Library building, ESL Federal Credit Union's headquarters and the performing arts center at Nazareth College.

"I rely on the team. Being able to motivate each other is key."

Healy's portfolio includes projects in urban design, architecture and interior space planning. They include the Monroe Community College downtown campus, which is scheduled to open to students next fall, the Rochester Museum & Science Center gateway addition currently in design, and religious facilities throughout the Rochester Roman Catholic Diocese, including St. Catherine of Siena Church in Mendon, St. Joseph's Church in Penfield and Sacred Heart Cathedral.

He also has a longstanding relationship with St. John Fisher College, completing projects such as the Integrated Health & Science Center, Victor E. Salerno Center for American Enterprise, Wegman's School of Nursing, Polisseni Track & Field Complex, the Donald E. Bain Campus Center and Skalny Admission Center.

Donald Bain, St. John Fisher's president emeritus, has known Healy for more than 14 years.

Healy was the primary architect at LaBella with whom Bain worked in planning and designing more than a dozen building construction projects on campus.

Experience and integrity

Healy's success as a leader is found in a combination of professional talent, extensive experience and personal integrity, Bain notes.

"Above all else, Bob is an excellent architect," Bain says. "He is perceptive, skilled and he employs state of the art technology to support the vision of his clients."

As a business leader, Healy knows how to organize and motivate his colleagues in pursuit of the company's mission and customer objectives, Bain says.

Bain fondly recalls the many times he and Healy met to plan campus projects.

"His patient and wise counsel were as remarkable as the form and function of the magnificent buildings he designed for the

college," Bain says.

Healy is a believer in LaBella's core values: employee leadership and innovation; stewardship of client and firm resources; honesty and integrity in all transactions; and growth of the company and its employees.

He most enjoys the friendships he has made over the years with employees and clients, as well as the diverse range of projects he has undertaken.

The worst part of the job is missing an opportunity, Healy says. Other challenges include finding work-life balance and keeping up with constant changes in technology.

Healy's focus is divided into four segments.

The first focus is on business performance, in which he works with the directors of LaBella's eight divisions to review current projects and proposals. Another area he concentrates on is business strategy, determining what projects would be a good fit for the business.

Healy is also still hands-on with architectural work. He is the principal in charge of several projects, including the MCC downtown campus, the Hermance Family Chapel of St. Basil the Great at St. John Fisher and the Dutchess County Justice and Transition Center, a \$190 million project.

"I still enjoy being able to practice," he says.

The final part of his job is community advocacy.

Healy maintains several professional and civic affiliations, including serving on the board of directors for organizations such as Monroe 2-Orleans Educational Foundation.

He is also an advocate for the American Institute of Architects at the national, state and local levels.

Healy describes himself as someone who is passionate about his work as well as an energetic business leader who guides his team toward a common vision.

In 2014, Healy was recognized as the Small Business Council Business Person of the Year. It was the first time a member of the architectural and engineering profession had received the honor.

Robert Pepe, LaBella's chief financial officer, met Healy in 1990 when he, too, joined LaBella.

Healy continually strives for improvement in all areas of the business, working with managers and employees to develop goals and align resources to help people to grow and succeed, Pepe says.

Healy takes the time to understand where the person he is speaking with is coming from.

"If it's a client relationship, he'll be sure to understand any constraints, or challenges, and with an understanding of the goals, he will act as a steward of our client's interests ... to help them meet their goals while working within any applicable limitations," Pepe says. "He can put himself in their shoes."

Healy also supports employee initiative and growth, and has a lot of passion for the design industry and the firm, Pepe says.

"It's clear that he wants to create and be part of an environment where others are empowered to do what they enjoy," he says.

"Bob supports a culture where employees feel that they are empowered to practice their profession."

He also has good business instincts and the ability to develop and maintain relationships, Pepe notes.

"He is very smart and does not need volumes of information or hours of deliberation to make decisions," Pepe says. "He also has the courage to make tough decisions."

Off the job

Healy and his wife, Catharine, live in

Pittsford. They have three adult children: sons, Kyle, 28, and Jesse, 24, and daughter, Samantha, 24.

In his free time, Healy is an avid golfer and a sports fan, rooting for the New York Mets and Syracuse Orange. A music enthusiast, he enjoys all types of musical genres.

On the job, Healy is focused on continuing to grow and diversify LaBella, with the help of the firm's employees.

"I rely on the team," he says. "Being able to motivate each other is key."

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