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## **Design Consultants, Inc. manages to stay busy, add staff and invest in our people and equipment**

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The past few years have not been the best in our 30 years in business, but they certainly haven't been our worst. During the recession, we've managed to stay very busy, add staff and invest in our people and equipment.

As we head into the fall, we have several exciting developments. We're moving from our longtime office on Medford St. in Somerville to a new location at Assembly Square. The office at 120 Middlesex Ave. (Suite 20), which is owned separately by the current members of our board of directors, is being built out to accommodate our firm as well as some other tenants.

One advantage of the recession is that it has allowed us to evaluate and fine-tune our staff. In this down market, we've found that a financially strong, growing firm with a healthy backlog is attractive to talented engineering and surveying professionals.

Also, for the first time in our history, Design Consultants, Inc. (DCI) is opening a satellite office. Our new North Shore office helps expand our reach in the northern part of the state, as well as into southern New Hampshire.

Staffing the office will be Stephen Sawyer, P.E., and Everett Chandler, PLS, who join our firm as principals in the engineering and land surveying department, respectively. We've also hired a new young engineer to supplement our existing production personnel, and we continue to look for opportunities to add and upgrade staff.

So how have we stayed busy and continued to grow while other firms have had layoffs or even closed their doors? I believe there are three keys to the success of DCI during the recession - balance, foresight, and conservative management.

**Balance.** It has always been DCI's policy to keep a reasonable balance in our workload on many fronts. We never want to be too beholden to one area of the market because if that area crashed, we could go with it. So we've focused on having no more than 60% of our work in either the public or private sector. We've also maintained land surveying, civil and traffic/transportation groups to ensure that we have multiple services to provide our clients. And finally, our work has never been too focused on one particular sector - we provide services to municipal, commercial/retail, residential and institutional clients alike.

**Foresight.** During the height of the private building boom, our executive team met and came to the consensus that a bust was on the horizon. At that time, in the mid-2000s, we were dangerously close to tipping the balance of work too far to the private-sector side. Our response was to begin heavily marketing public-sector clients and prospects and, as a result, we landed some excellent municipal projects that have helped sustain us through the private-sector downturn.

**Conservative Management.** Financial experts and management consultants have told us, time and again, that it is foolish to keep a lot of cash in reserve and that we should use debt to finance the

company's operations. I have never been so glad that, time and again, we stubbornly ignored this advice. While we've seen debt-laden firms torn apart by the banks shutting off the spigot and calling in their loans, DCI remains on solid financial footing. Sure, the cash ebbs and flows, and tapping into the line of credit is sometimes preferable to dipping into the reserves. But the bottom line is that our firm's financial management philosophy is conservative, leaving us with money in reserve should we need it. In today's economy, this approach has served us well.

As we approach 2011, our firm and our industry still face many challenges. At DCI, we believe that if we stick to our ideals, while continuing to do the things necessary to move forward and grow as a firm, the state of the economy will never dictate our success.

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