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Company of the Month: RJ O'Connell & Associates celebrates ten years with steady growth and diversification

April 24, 2014 - Retail

On March 17th of this year, RJ O'Connell & Associates (RJOC) hit its 10-year mark and shows no signs of slowing down. The firm continues to be a leader in civil engineering, land planning, and land surveying disciplines providing services to many of the real estate industry's top companies.

Prior to founding RJOC in 2004, Rich O'Connell managed the Boston office of Carter & Burgess, a national engineering/architectural firm with over 30 offices across the country with 150 employees in Boston, and he spent the previous 20 years working his way to senior vice president at Sumner Schein Architects & Engineers, a leading architectural/engineering firm in the commercial retail industry for over 75 years.

O'Connell felt he was losing touch with his clients and the design process so he partnered with two longtime associates, Brian Dundon and Brian McCarthy, both of who commanded a proven track record on numerous successful projects and they were extremely well respected in the development community. In addition, they had all worked together for the previous 15 years, which allowed a seamless transition. RJ O'Connell & Associates was formed and together they immediately went back to their roots; solid planning, detailed design, and servicing the clients.

Their business philosophy is simple; to form partnerships with their clients to provide the highest quality of services and meet their expectations in a timely cost effective manner.

With this work ethic and the support of several loyal clients, the firm's reputation spread quickly resulting in several years of steady growth. In order to meet this demand, the partners reached out to a long time associate with their same values, and Roy Smith joined the firm as a partner in 2007.

2007 was also the year the firm added land surveying to its list of services to better serve their clients. RJOC believes successful projects start with great survey and having control of that phase is important. In order to support the growing staff, RJOC relocated to Stoneham also in 2007, doubling its office space.

This steady growth earned RJOC a prominent place on the Zweig Hot Firm List in 2009. Each year since 2000, the Zweig Letter, published by Mark Zweig, a national consulting firm to the A/E/P industry, has recognized the top 200 fastest growing architectural, engineering, and environmental consulting firms. RJOC was ranked 86th in the nation. "It was such an honor to be listed alongside some of the most notable firms in the country," said O'Connell. "We have the plaque in our lobby; I see it every day, and it reminds me how privileged I am to have such great partners and the hardest working employees one could ask for. They are experienced and committed to our philosophy of servicing the client."

This solid base in commercial/retail lead to some very successful projects in those early years. The massive South Shore Plaza renovations/expansion, Gloucester Commons, The Loop and Loop West, over 800,000 s/f in Kissimmee, Fla. , and Highland Plaza, Easton, Mass., along with ongoing

projects for their retail clients Target, Lowes, BJ's and CVS to name a few.

Leveraging this base, it was a natural progression to diversify into the mixed-use and hospitality sectors. The Hyatt Place, Braintree (formerly Sheraton site) for the Carpenter Company, the redevelopment of the former Polaroid Campus in Waltham, planned for over one million s/f of office, residential, hospitality and retail for RMD, and Chestnut Hill Square, Newton, Mass. for New England Development are a few of the significant projects added to RJOC's portfolio in recent years.

The firm partnered with Samuels & Associates, and they have been a loyal client from the beginning. Both firms, completing several retail projects across New England over the past ten years, lead to RJOC being selected to join their team for the renovation and redevelopment of the former Howard Johnson Hotel, now the Verb. It is destined to be another in a string of successful Samuels & Associates' projects revitalizing the Fenway area of Boston.

RJOC has several hotel/hospitality projects either completed or in design. They recently added a ground up hospital project and were selected by Boylston Properties/Wilder Companies to join the concept planning team for the Arsenal Mall in Watertown, another challenging mixed-use redevelopment further expanding the breath of their experience and services.

The firm has been fortunate to have loyal and long-time clients for sustainability. "It's about relationships," said O'Connell. "Both long-term and nurturing new ones." Their client list is impressive with many of the top developers and end users in the country, and it continues to grow. They recently completed the design and permitting for a 100,000 s/f office building for the Gutierrez Company and are excited to add them to the growing list of top tier developer clients.

RJOC has a strong following of experienced specialty consultants to draw from when necessary to pull together the right team for their projects. Notably, when Warwick Mall was struck with near devastating property damage from a historic flood event in 2010, the owner's contacted RJOC and an emergency response team was assembled. "We worked with RIDEM, FEMA and multiple other agencies, and the team investigated the circumstances and developed protection and prevention measures both onsite and off-site to be incorporated into the reconstruction work," said Roy Smith, who spearheaded the operation.

Alternative energy is another growth area with wind and solar leading the way. The firm has been working with Wing Power, Inc., Con Edison Solutions and Borrego Solar for several years and just recently added Solar City as a client. These firms are developing some cutting edge projects across the country, and RJOC is there to service them.

RJOC has traditionally been a private sector consultant; leveraging their expertise in hydrology, stormwater management, and land survey they have been prequalified for state work with MassDOT since 2012. "It's another avenue for diversification," said Brian Dundon. "We'll follow it with the same intensity we bring to all our projects, and see where it leads."

Being a small firm with big firm capabilities appears to be the best fit for these hands on partners. "We've had steady growth but we are aware size can be an issue. We do not want to grow too fast and lose track of our client's needs and our solid design reputation," said McCarthy. "We've been in that situation before so that is something we pay attention to."

In conjunction with their 10-year anniversary, the firm is in process of launching a new website. Please visit to see their full story - www.rjoconnell.com.