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Company of the Month: Vantage Builders - Celebrating 20 years of building relationships

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The Vantage team at the annual Striper Tournament.

Waltham, MA When Vantage Builders co-founders John Connor and Ed Silva would get together for lunch during the early years of their construction careers, the timing would often work out so that “The Price Is Right” was on TV just as the bill came. So what was there for two construction guys to do? What else but to place bets on the “Showcase Showdown” with the stakes being the lunch tab. Could it be that this simple bit of “estimating” gave them the idea to start their own firm?

“I honestly don’t recall who first brought up the idea of starting out on our own,” said John. “But I do remember it was over these casual lunches, just going out to grab something to eat between meetings or on our way to jobsites. We got to know each other as coworkers, then friends and then realized we had a lot of the same ideas for how a successful GC firm should operate. Those lunches are when Vantage Builders started.”

It’s not unusual for a relationship like this to be at the core of a Vantage Builders story, as relationships are an important part of the firm’s success – with clients, team members, and all the companies the firm works with. What began over those lunches has now grown into one of the most successful mid-sized general contracting, construction management and design-build firms in Massachusetts, with Vantage Builders celebrating its 20th anniversary on December 8th.

“We pride ourselves on our strong, long-term relationships, with clients, architects, engineers, brokers, subcontractors, everyone we work with,” said Ed. “It’s one of the keys to our success. More than 80% of our business comes from repeat clients.”

During its 20 years in business, Vantage Builders has helped hundreds of clients succeed in their industries. The firm has worked with clients to launch businesses, expand operations or move to new locations; helped some of the top educational institutions in the world to make their facilities more welcoming to their diverse students; and partnered with the region’s top building owners to improve their facilities and prepare for new tenants at their office, laboratory and industrial buildings. And in just the few short years that the cannabis industry has been operative in Massachusetts, the firm has quickly become one of the most sought-after and experienced builders of cultivation facilities and dispensaries.

Ed and John in 2000.

Vantage Builders founders John Connor and Ed Silva in 2020.

“One of the greatest feelings is driving around and being able to say ‘we built that’ or ‘we helped that company get started,’” said John. “There’s a similar feeling, walking into the office and feeling the buzz of energy, with groups of team members working on projects in a couple of different

conference rooms.”

Only one conference room was needed when the firm launched with a half dozen employees. Since then the company has grown to approximately 50 team members in 2020. But growing for the sake of growth has never been the point but rather to assemble the best team to serve the firm’s expanding client base. The increased client roster, and increased firm size, has required some structural changes within the firm. During the past year the firm has bolstered its management team with new chief operating officer and chief financial officer roles. And it’s also important to the firm to bring on team members who not only thrive in the close-knit, team-oriented environment that has been established but can help make it flourish.

“My favorite part of being at Vantage is the team we have,” said Peter Michals, superintendent. “There is a tremendous amount of support and it enables us to make our commitments to our clients. I’ve always said that Ed and John have surrounded themselves first and foremost with the best people, who just happen to be amazing construction professionals.”

“One thing we learned pretty quickly as founders was to hire people smarter than ourselves,” said Ed. “Surrounding ourselves with great people is what really helped bring the firm to the next level of success.”

Of course, it’s not “all work and no play.” Company culture is critical at Vantage and the firm holds several annual events for team members to get to know one another, which is very important with the firm being split almost evenly between the field and office workers. Not surprisingly, some events feature a little competition, whether during the annual Striper Tournament (now in its 20th year), a bowling night or the Thompson Island Trail Run. “We had two boats at the first Striper Tournament and we were up to 10 at last count – a nice problem to have!” laughed Ed.

Also important at Vantage Builders is a strong relationship with the community. Since the firm’s start, John and Ed have placed a premium on the firm being a good corporate citizen through community involvement. Vantage has assisted dozens of local, regional and national organizations over the years, whether its donating to a charity, sponsoring an event or supporting a client’s or employee’s participation in a fundraising drive. This year, as the firm celebrated its anniversary, the team was finishing a food drive for Move for Hunger and collecting holiday gifts for New Hope, Inc., a Vantage client that helps families affected by domestic and sexual violence.

There have certainly been some uncertain times during the firm’s 20 years in business. And what has gotten the firm through this challenging year is what got it through the other 19 years, namely relationships, with its clients, Vantage teammates in the field and the office, as well as all the architects, engineers, subcontractors and others who have been involved in the more than 1,000 projects the firm has completed.

“There is no doubt that 2020 was a tough year,” said Ed. “But after the shutdown, as sites began to reopen, we got busy again and we were able to keep people employed and keep the firm going strong. And 2021 is projecting to be the firm’s best year yet, for numbers of projects and revenue.

So while we're looking forward to putting 2020 in the rearview mirror, we're even more looking forward to the firm's future."

Vantage Builders is a full-service construction management, general contracting and design-build firm that serves corporations, building owners, developers, property managers and institutions throughout New England. The firm focuses on six critical vertical markets: corporate, education, healthcare, industrial, retail and cannabis.

The firm's clients represent a wide range of industries, reflecting the rich variety of businesses in the region.

For more information on Vantage Builders, please visit www.vb-inc.com or follow the firm on LinkedIn, Instagram, Twitter and Facebook.

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