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Company of the Month: AHA Consulting Engineers celebrates 30 years...and beyond

February 18, 2022 - Construction Design & Engineering



AHA Consulting Engineers' founders Arthur Abbood and Martin Holloran

Lexington, MA AHA Consulting Engineers (AHA) opened their doors on August 28, 1991, as Abbood Holloran and Associates building on Arthur Abbood and Martin Holloran's client relationships and expertise in mechanical, electrical, plumbing, and fire protection consulting. The choice to leave an established firm to start their own was well worth the challenge, as AHA's generated more than \$1 million in revenue during its first year and more than \$2.5 million the next. Holloran, co-founding partner and current CEO, described the quick growth, "It was a rocket ship ride," as Abbood Holloran grew from three employees to over 100 by the late 1990s, and relocated from Waltham to Lexington, Mass., where their headquarters are currently located. Abbood Holloran also quickly gained recognition working on marquee projects for Staples, Biogen, and Sun Microsystems, which began to shape their future.

Spagnolo Gisness Architects, a Boston-based architectural firm founded in 1991, has collaborated with AHA on more than 350 projects, 20 of which are ongoing. "We both came from established Boston firms 30 years ago," recalls Jeff Tompkins, SGA founding partner. "We were in the process of forming SGA while we were working at another firm and Marty Holloran and Arthur Abbood were at the point in the same process of forming their own firm." AHA and SGA knew the secret to

building success. “It’s relationships,” Holloran said.

Abbood Holloran built a robust portfolio in the science & technology market. The firm started “when [biotech] was a fledgling market and a big job was 25,000 s/f,” Holloran recalls. “Most people back then, believe it or not, didn’t want to have anything to do with [biotech]. They were afraid. I was one of the early [biotech supporters], and as such, my name was out there.”

As their 10th anniversary in 2001 approached, Abbood Holloran saw monumental transformations as Arthur Abbood began his move into retirement and Holloran, Dan Campia, Joe Kazlauskas, and Kevin Jensen took over stewardship of the company. The name was changed to AHA Consulting Engineers to honor their past and to foreshadow their future.

AHA Consulting Engineers’ managing partners Kevin Jensen and Conleth O’Flynn

Bob Andrews, who was among the 2001 inaugural class of LEED Accredited Professionals, established their Energy & Sustainability department. Having guided over 100 projects to LEED certification, including five platinum certifications, their Energy & Sustainability department is a vital resource for those looking to reduce the environmental impact of their cutting-edge spaces.

That same year also saw the opening of their Alpharetta, GA office by Conleth O’Flynn, Jim McMullen, and Anthony Staffier. Using the template set by Abbood and Holloran, the office grew to over 30 employees, and carved out a strong presence in the mission critical, corporate, industrial, and higher education markets.

Georgia Tech’s Tony Zivalich, associate vice president for real estate development, describes the working relationship with AHA, “We work very closely with [AHA] to understand some of the design issues and constraints,” said Zivalich. “AHA brings special subject matter expertise, as it relates to datacenter development, laboratory development, and cleanroom development,” he adds. “Whenever we have some special use, they tend to provide our go-to expertise.”

Marking their 20th anniversary, AHA opened their newest office in Cambridge, Mass. Located in Kendall Sq., the heart of the booming science & technology industry, they served many prominent and emerging clients and businesses in the R&D and pharmaceutical arena. This office recently moved to the heart of Boston, a central locale for clients, staff, and the historic Freedom Trail. They also ventured into offering services in new growing fields of Building Information Modeling (BIM) and commissioning—both natural extensions of their current offerings.

AHA, an early adopter of BIM technology, was one of the first engineering firms designing in REVIT. Their BIM services blossomed to include creating virtual walk-throughs, point cloud laser scanning, and clash detection services. Their commissioning department allowed them to focus more in depth

on their client's needs. They have offered green building certification and systems commissioning for science & technology, academic, mission critical, corporate, industrial, healthcare, and mixed-use clients and projects.

To mark their 25th anniversary, Jensen and O'Flynn took leadership as AHA's managing partners, while Holloran remained CEO. As Holloran described his decision to start AHA, he said, "I knew I wanted to be a partner at a firm. If my previous boss had offered me a share in the business, I would have stayed and probably would be there now."

They took it upon themselves to not repeat that mistake, developing their "path to partnership" document, which is a deliberate and unprecedented plan to guide their staff to grow personally and professionally and to recognize those who make significant contributions to the success and growth of the firm. Currently, AHA has 24 partners as well as four associated partners, eight senior associates, and 22 associates, along with 26 employees who have been with the firm for over 20 years.

Under the current leadership of Jensen, O'Flynn, Holloran, and newest board members Bob Andrews and Tom Joyner, they look forward to their next 30 years. "We often wonder what services we might offer, what projects may define us, and what challenges we will face that will improve us. We do know that we will continue to actively implement cutting edge designs to reduce our clients' carbon footprints, work to make the field of engineering more diverse, grow new markets, and guide our young professionals as they prepare to become the next generations of AHA's leadership," said Jensen, one of AHA's two managing partners.

One thing will remain the same, AHA will continue to offer passionate, pragmatic and holistic services and solutions to those they serve: Owners, operators, fortune 500 companies, ivy league schools, top real estate developers, and award-winning architects. As O'Flynn, one of the firm's managing partners, looks to the future, "We honor those that have brought us to this milestone and look forward to establishing new partnerships that will propel us further."