

A Powerful Connection

Roger Helgoth on ACEC's business knowledge and legislative results.



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eliminate unfair government competition. Winning that battle is critical to the future of our industry, and I am confident our profession will prevail.

Q. What is on your firm's legislative wish list?

A. There's a lot of environmental work related to major highway projects and transportation and aviation projects, so we're very supportive of transportation legislation and of ACEC's advocacy efforts with regard to the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21) and the Aviation Investment and Reform Act for the 21st Century (AIR-21).

However, the legislation that probably affects our firm the most is the water infrastructure legislation, and we are most active with ACEC in that area. I attended the Consulting Congress Day event in March, and found it to be a very rewarding experience. ACEC does an excellent job of educating members on the various pieces of legislation, and I was particularly interested in the updates on different issues related to the environment.

Q. How has ACEC helped your firm, and why do you think it's a worthwhile investment for you?

A. I started practicing engineering in the late 1960s. Throughout my professional

career, ACEC has been an excellent source of reference materials. Obviously, I wasn't a principal in those early years, but I had mentors who were strongly aligned with ACEC as the business relationship that they had. Fortunately, those mentors shared the ACEC information.

When my partner and I first started our firm in 1989, we had some friends and advisors who told us, "If you're going to start a business, you'd better have a good business plan, a good banker, a good attorney, a good accountant, and some good professional linkage." ACEC has provided us with an extremely strong linkage with our fellow professionals, and it has paid dividends to us over the years.

Q. How does your firm keep up with the latest technologies while at the same time keeping an eye on your budget?

A. Even though we're a small firm, we work hard to stay abreast of new technologies. For example, right now we're working on membrane biological reactors for wastewater treatment that have not yet been tried extensively in the United States, and we're involved in some of the leading aspects of this technology. We're also involved heavily in ultraviolet disinfection techniques for water and wastewater applications. If you don't stay involved in new technologies,

you're going to be out of business sooner rather than later. We feel very strongly about that.

When we send members of our staff to an ACEC meeting or educational seminar, we do a "brown-bag" session internally as soon as they return so that everybody can take advantage of the valuable information.

Q. What type of growth do you see for your firm over the next five years?

A. We've made one acquisition since the company was founded, and that was very successful for us. But the main method for growing the firm will continue to be through the careful hiring of personnel. We focus pretty heavily on master's degree candidates from quality environmental engineering programs. Right now we have about 40 employees. We expect our firm to grow by 10 or 15 new people in the next year or two, and our goal is to be up to about 100 people within five years.

Right now it works out that our staff is fully utilized. We maintain a high utilization, and utilization emphasis is a critical parameter. Everyone in our firm, including principals, has a utilization goal. We don't want to get into a situation where a project stalls and we are forced to lay people off. We've never had to do that, and I don't want to ever get into that situation.

Q. Public/private cooperation on infrastructure has increased significantly in recent years. Should this trend continue?

A. In my opinion, the only way federal, state, and local governments are going to keep a handle on their costs is by increasing the outsourcing of services. ACEC's board recently approved a strong policy statement on outsourcing, and the Council is undertaking an aggressive advocacy effort to