

BUSINESS

BEHIND THE TOP 100

Consulting engineers compete in cities throughout upstate

SEAN DOBBIN
STAFF WRITER

The Rochester Top 100, which annually recognizes the fastest-growing privately held companies in the nine-county region, is sponsored by the Rochester Business Alliance and KPMG.

Here is an interview with Allen Casey, president of M/E Engineering PC.

How did this company get started?

We started in 1991, and it was myself and three other partners. We had worked together at another firm, and we decided it was time to start on our own. We grew from four of us to 50-some of us by 1999.

In '99, we purchased a firm in Buffalo that was about the same size as our firm, so in one day we went from 55 (employees) to 110. Then in '03, my other partner decided there were some good opportunities in the Albany area, so he decided to start something up out there, and a year or two after that, we had some opportunity to pick up some business in Syracuse.

Now, we've got about 60 people here, 60 in Buffalo and 60 in Albany and Syracuse. For a firm like ours, that's big. There are really no firms that do what we do that are this size, aside from in the big metropolitan areas like New York City or Boston.

What areas of engineering do you focus on?

We do the building systems: the heating, venting, air conditioning, plumbing, fire protection, electrical and a lot of things relative to energy. There are a lot of places that just want to optimize the

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M/E ENGINEERING PC. No. 17

M/E Engineering PC: Consulting engineers.

Year founded: 1991.

Location: 150 N. Chestnut St., Rochester.

Executives: Allen Casey, president, 58, of Rochester; Ron Mead, vice president, of Irondequoit; Joseph Straub, vice president, of Albany; Bill Liberto, vice president, of Buffalo.

Employees: 190.

Web: www.meengineering.com.



JAMIE GERMANO staff photographer

M/E Engineering and RIT officials meet over a project at RIT's James E. Gleason building. Clockwise from left are Matt Shannon of Shortsville (M/E), Catherine Ahern of Greece (RIT), Ron Mead of Irondequoit (M/E), Tom Hyzen of Brighton (RIT), Brian Danker of Perinton (M/E) and Doug Rose of Honeoye Falls (M/E).

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energy efficiency of buildings, and we've been pushing that forever. It's not really sexy like alternative energy with windmills and fuel cells and solar and all that other stuff, but it actually pays back a lot quicker and it's tried and true.

So with our continuing client base, we've had a great success in that. We've done projects at Monroe Community College, Cornell University, UR and Strong (Hospital).

How has the current economy been affecting you?

The economy, at the moment, is more concern than anything else. We know that things are slowing down, but we always have a good-sized backlog. If something falls through, you've got to have something else to fall back on, so we've always maintained a good workload.

We saw this in '01 and '02, where things just slowed down. Then, unfortunately, we had to

react to it, which meant having a 10 percent cut in staff, but the next year we were right back up again. We've been lucky enough to maintain a broad client base.

What's the competition like in this industry?

There are a number of smaller firms that do what we do, or you get the big full-service firms that do architecture, structure, civil and everything else, and this is part of their wrapped services.

We stick with what we know, and I think we bring a lot more expertise to the table. But we are a bigger firm now and we eat up a lot of stuff. We need to do \$2 million worth of work every four weeks, so it's a lot. A lot of companies we compete with don't do that in two years.

Are you considering any further expansions?

We think about it. There are some big metro areas like Boston and D.C., but that's not our culture. The big metro stuff is just not us. We're known as mid-size, and our people think that way: We're team players and we're not out there to squeeze everybody for every last penny.

The other thing is that our guys are happy where they are. This is home. So if we're going to buy a business someplace else, we have to be there. There are people who have tried just going and acquiring a business and doing the corporate fly-by thing, but I think you've got to keep track of what's going on. You need to have a guy there that opens the doors on Monday and closes them on Friday.

But in a few more years, that'll happen. We do feel we have to grow. We need to continue our growth so our employees get the opportunities they deserve. As people become more capable in their jobs and they want to expand, you have to give them the opportunity to do it. We can't just say, "You've got to wait 10 more years."

What's your average workday like?

It used to be a lot of project involvement as well as management, but now the idea is to pass off the project involvement to other folks. So it's primarily keeping on top of what's going on in each of our other offices on the business end of things.

So not much hands-on work any more? Do you miss it?

Ha, nope, not at all.

How do you spend time away from work?

In the summertime, I try to play as much golf as I can. That's another thing we're real spoiled about here. There are a few good courses in Buffalo and Albany and Syracuse, but there's nothing compared to all the great clubs we've got here. If you love golf, it's the place to be.

What's the best movie you've seen in the past year?

The name escapes me, but it was a documentary, a guy in Massachusetts who went to a nursing home. It was an indie film — we get over to the Little as frequently as possible — and it had these old folks singing rock and roll.

Was it Young@Heart?

Yeah, that was it. I see a lot of good movies, but that's one that I remember. □

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