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Local spotlight

Engineering company builds on solid history

Bloomfield Hills firm touts high standards in consulting clients on infrastructure projects.

Maureen McDonald / Special to The Detroit News

BLOOMFIELD HILLS -- Thanks to what George Hubbell, president, calls "a terrific set of clients," Hubbell Roth and Clark Inc. has surpassed 90 years in business with a budget as firmly in the black as the asphalt roads it helps build. Sales are expected to top \$30 million in 2008, about even with 2007.

"Clients trust us. Some civil engineering companies might offer a cheaper price but one cost overrun negates any savings. Some (clients) have been doing business with our fathers and grandfathers," said Hubbell, the great grandson of the privately held firm's founder, Clarence W. Hubbell.

His father was so important to designing and installing the sanitation system of early 20th century Detroit he had a street on the northwest side named after him. Laboring on infrastructure projects isn't something with flash and charm, but people expect clean water, dry basements and safe sewage channels.

"We have very high standards for public safety and project durability," Hubbell said. Most of its wastewater and reclamation projects must meet environmental mandates of local, state and federal agencies and the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design or a green building rating system.

The firm has headquarters in Bloomfield Hills and offices in Detroit, Mount Clemens, Pontiac, Howell, Grand Rapids and Orlando. Clients include General Motors Corp., Ford Motor Co., Oakland County.

It competes with environmental engineering firms such as Wade Trim Associates and ATK Peerless Inc. Among its achievements is partnering with Lawrence Technological University in 2004 to engineer the first pre-cast bridge in the country, using carbon-fiber-reinforced

polymer on an overpass in Southfield to prevent corrosion and extend service life.

"Hubbell Roth and Clark solve problems for their customers," said John McCulloch, Oakland County drain commissioner. In 2007, Hubbell's team suggested how to save \$160 million on a proposed Evergreen-Farmington sanitary sewer system, serving 15 communities in the southern region of the county.

McCulloch said he's been the star speaker at numerous environmental and civic conferences, demonstrating how the plan saved taxpayer money, reduced pollution in the Rouge River and held up to performance standards. "When I work with this firm I take advantage of their political, historical and technical expertise," he said.

Hubbell Clark and Roth was started by three farmers with engineering degrees who saw the need for sanitation as Detroit's population doubled and tripled in size to accommodate massive growth in the auto industry. Today's recruitment team seeks advanced degrees in engineering, business, architecture, project management, construction and environment.

Tradition is as important as education. One of the current partners is a grandson of Homer W. Clark and another is a descendant of Albert Roth.

"We have a philosophy handed down generation to generation. Treat your clients and employees with respect. If you do so, good things happen," Hubbell said.

What makes him happiest? His firm has been integrally involved in helping achieve quality tap water in southeast Michigan. "Tap water has fewer impurities and is considerably cheaper."

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