





Metro Consulting Associates builds on strong relationships

Starting a new company in the depths of the worst recession in a half-century perhaps isn't the smartest move. But sometimes a company beats the odds.

Jeff Evans, a land surveyor by profession, launched his Metro Consulting Associates in 2009 after many years of professional land development work with a much larger firm.

"It was a struggle just to keep the lights on," Evans said this month of those first entrepreneurial days. "We were trying to do everything just to get our name out there."

But past relationships paid off, both with potential clients Evans had worked with over the years and the employees Evans needed to staff his firm.

In early 2010, the firm landed a contract to help build a major wind farm in Gratiot County in central Michigan. "That got the ball rolling," he said.

A major pipeline job in Kentucky followed, along with work for the Tim Horton's chain and a piece of the engineering contract for the Cobo Center upgrades, laying out the location of pilings to support Cobo's structural changes.

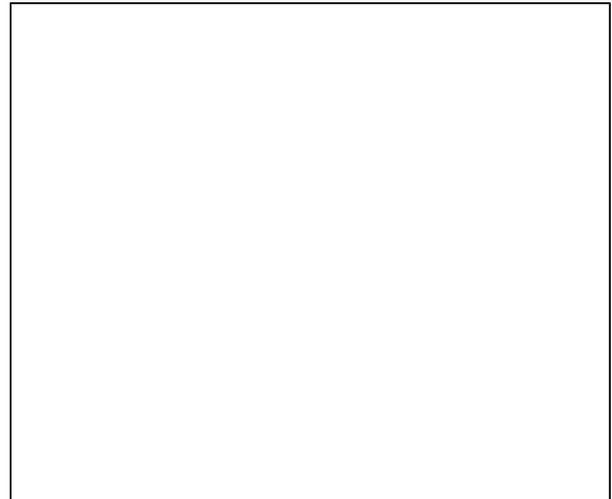
Metro Consulting, handling all types of utility, pipeline and other land development work, now employs 30 staffers -- engineers, landscape architects, planners, surveyors and more -- and expects to grow to 35 to 40 by year-end.

The firm is prequalified for work by DTE Energy and other major utilities in the state. And revenues have grown from zero in 2009 to about \$5 million a year today.

Based in Belleville west of Metro Airport, the firm has just opened a satellite office in Chrysler House, the downtown Detroit skyscraper formerly known as the Dime Building owned by Quicken Loans founder and Chairman Dan Gilbert and his partners. Metro Consulting will use the office when Evans and other staffers are working in Detroit.

Damon Garrett, director of engineering for Metro Consulting, said the firm opened the Detroit office to be part of the changes happening downtown with the work of Gilbert and others.

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"We wanted to be a part of the rebirth," Garrett said. "We strategically came to this building because of the ownership and what they're doing and wanted to be part of that."

The downtown office is proving so useful that Metro Consulting may soon lease more suites in the building.

"We spend a fair amount of time down here," Garrett said. "Quiet time. You can zero in and focus on, 'Hey, I need to get three hours of solid work down, no phones, no distractions.' "

Metro Consulting prides itself on strong, long-term relationships. Much of its pipeline work comes from clients Evans and his team knew in previous jobs.

Relationships are so important that Metro Consulting rarely bids on new business.

"It's almost all word-of-mouth and repeat business," Evans said.

Relying mainly on relationships means that Metro Consulting will cut ties with a client if the relationship is uncomfortable.

Garrett told of one decision the company made near the end of 2010 when they did not renew with a client whom they felt was not open enough with them to let Metro Consulting do its work properly. It meant a short-term cut in revenue, but ultimately the firm's leaders felt they did the right thing.

"We said we did very well but is that the

kind of client we want to work with in the future?" Garrett said.

Evans agreed. The firm believes in teamwork both internally and with clients.

"You try to pair yourself with clients a lot like you," he said.

Contact John Gallagher: 313-222-5173 or gallagher99@freepress.com

More Details: Metro Consulting Associates

Line of business: Civil engineering, land planning and surveying, etc.

Headquarters: Belleville, with a satellite office in Detroit

Employees: 30

Annual revenues: \$5 million

Website: www.metroca.net

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