

# Rochester Democrat and Chronicle

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## **Bergmann Associates thrives in Architectural, Engineering World**

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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 Thomas Mitchell, president and CEO of Bergmann Associates.

How did this company get started?

Don Bergmann, along with several associates, founded the firm in 1980. Don, who retired in 2004, was tremendously successful in building the firm into the largest (engineering and architecture) firm in upstate New York, and Brian Dougherty, John Murray and Gary Olin, three of the original associates, are still with the firm today. The firm started as an engineering firm that engaged in infrastructure work like bridges, highway, rail, site development, survey and so on, and soon after, it added architecture services. It wasn't long before the firm developed full-service architecture and engineering capability. We are currently a 320-person firm with 210 on East Main Street in Rochester with revenues in excess of \$45 million.

When did you join the company?

I came to Rochester in the mid-80s. I was down in Baton Rouge, La., and was involved in commercial nuclear power. But my wife and I, our families are both from the Southern Tier — she was from Elmira, I was from Corning — and she wanted to return to the area. An opportunity came up here and it brought me back to the area, and then I ended up joining Bergmann in August 2001. Going from nuclear power to architecture is an interesting transition. In the nuclear business, no one takes your word for anything. Everything is analyzed, documented and reviewed by a number of different people. So it's a very intricate process. There, the projects take 20 years to build, if they're ever built at all. So, it's a lot more fun here. You always have to realize that your responsibility is to public safety, but you can be a little more creative.

How is the current economy affecting your business?

We haven't seen any negative impacts from a slowing economy. But we are not a recession-proof business, so we need to be cautious. One thing that has provided us evidence that the economy is slowing is the ability to hire quality people. It was difficult a year ago to get more than one candidate for a position, and now we get multiple candidates. We've added 40 employees in the last 12 months. You're one of the four firms working on the RenSquare project.

When a project experiences some delays, how does it affect you?

It's one of those things where you wished it would move faster because you could be more involved. But it's not unusual for projects to take this long. We have projects here where it's been 10 years and we still haven't turned over the final set of construction documents. Like anything else, when you first win a project you want to get going on it. But it's actually been very exciting over the last few months. Even though the footprint's been reduced a little bit and we've had to reduce costs, there's been great collaboration between the four firms, as well as the owners — the county, the city, the Rochester-Genesee Regional Transportation Authority and Monroe Community College. It's been very stimulating because they get to share ideas and really look at the cost implications and then rethink the way they approach things. The public response to Ren Square has been somewhat mixed.

Do you spend any time paying attention to that?

You do hear the public comments in the background, and I think that we recognize that, as always, you need to be accountable. There are folks that are watching. But it actually hasn't been as discouraging as you may think because these things often do take time, and as mentioned, 10 years is not unusual for something that's maybe even smaller in size. This is \$230 million. This is one of the bigger ones and they take time. And often it's that piece that just went in, the environmental piece, which takes all the time.

How do you spend time away from work?

I like skiing a lot and that's why I liked coming back to New York. I like tennis, and I try to play as much as I can, at least a couple times a week, both winter and summer. As a family, we've always liked camping. My daughters are older now, but we always reflect on the best vacations we've had — and we've done the Disney World and the Outer Banks and the ski vacations in the Rockies — but they always talk about the camping experience where we've just pitched a tent in a remote area and spent time together as the most fun.

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BERGMANN ASSOCIATES No. 79

Bergmann Associates: Consulting engineers, architects, survey and interior design services.

Year founded: 1980.

Location: 28 E. Main St., Rochester.

Executives: Thomas Mitchell, president and CEO, of Webster; Jim Buckley, CFO, of Greece; Jim Durfee, principal design architect, of Mendon; Bob McCubbin, director of building business, of Greece.

Employees: 320.

Web: www.bergmannpc.com.