

Bergmann plans to ride a wave of innovation over the next 40 years

As Bergmann bids farewell to 2020 — a milestone 40th anniversary for the firm — there is plenty to look back upon with pride.

The array of American Institute of Architects awards. The multitude of satisfied engineering and architectural clients across the Northeast. The behind-the-scenes expertise that kept trains criss-crossing the Genesee River gorge in Letchworth State Park.

But why look back when so much lies ahead?

“Instead of focusing on the past, let’s focus on the future,” said Pete Giovenco, the firm’s president and CEO who has been with Bergmann for 31 years. “What’s Bergmann going to be like in the next 40 years?”

Quite a bit different, that’s for sure. Oh, there will always be a stable of highly qualified professionals, but there will be a complement of tech-savvy minds merging what has always worked with what will soon be the new normal.

“Architects and engineers are still vital parts of the future with respect to creating places and the concept of design,” Giovenco said. “It’s now really the intellectual backbone of these designs that are going to create needs of special skills in communications, technology, the Internet of Things.

“We’re creating smart buildings, if you will, smart infrastructure that is going to be not just a piece of pavement but something that actually provides data.”

Which is why the continual transition to the future begins with the hiring process.

“Part of what we’re doing today, when we’re hiring, we’re really looking for people that are open to ideas, innovation, constantly improving themselves and embracing technology,” Giovenco said. “We’re really trying to find people that can adapt to these changing technologies very quickly. When they can’t adapt, we’re going to need to tap other resources to be able to attract those people to our company.”

That will be done either through creating positions or acquisitions. Bergmann acquired two firms in 2019 and smart growth is still vital. There are now around 450 employees across 15 offices in five states, with the Rochester workforce around 180.

But Giovenco isn’t looking to absorb more firms just to say Bergmann grew.

“Companies are trying to simply get bigger; what we’re trying to do is fight that urge,” he said. “We want to get bigger, but not just for the sake of getting bigger but for the sake of really providing value to our clients. We want to focus on value and not commodity.”

He believes Bergmann has become a trusted firm for a wide variety of clients because of the manner in which it conducts business.

“Bergmann has a great reputation that it’s earned for the last 40 years of being an excellent architectural engineering firm,” Giovenco said. “When you think of Bergmann, you think of quality, you think of client service. We don’t want to be simply thought of as a low-cost provider to our solutions, because we think that the solutions we come up with are innovative. That is going to drive up the worth and the value of our client.”

He knows value is driven by expertise.



One of the solar power projects Bergmann has worked on. (Provided photo)



Pete Giovenco

“You need to be experts in what you do, so you need to be able to hire the best and the brightest talent in the world,” he said. “That’s one of things we’re working very hard on right now, trying to find, attract and bring in the best talent.”

Thanks to lessons learned during the coronavirus pandemic, that’s now a little easier to do. Geography no longer creates a barrier. The somewhat universal realization that employees working remotely are no less productive than those in an office has revamped the hiring process.

“Before, all the talent had to be somewhat centrally located around our offices,” Giovenco said. “Now, if that person sits in San Antonio and he or she is the best person in the world who does that, we’re just going to go ahead and bring that person into the company because we know that they can provide value even from afar.”

Bergmann will still have two primary areas of service: infrastructure and buildings.

Highways and bridges have long been a Bergmann specialty, and that won’t change. The capabilities of those highways will, however.

“Autonomous vehicles are not that far away, so that’s going to continue to push the envelope on ITS (intelligent transportation systems),” Giovenco said. “With 5G coming online now, cars will be able to communicate very quickly with roads, with signage, with information that will help them drive autonomously even better than humans. We have to design the infrastructure and the technology in the infrastructure to support autonomous vehicles.

“You have a crest of a hill. What’s coming on the other side of that crest. You’re not going to be able to see it through the car’s radar so you’re going to rely on 5G to have sensors on the other side of that hill that report back to the car that there might be a traffic issue there, and it has to be instantaneous. We’ll have experts in that area that haven’t

been there before, that are very technology oriented, not necessarily engineering oriented.”

He also foresees growth in hydropower, waterways and especially in rail, with many short lines enjoying a resurgence.

“Rail is going through a transformation,” Giovenco said. “Back in the day it made a lot of its money on coal; moving coal and fossil fuels from one location to the next. What rail has now become is the lifeline for imports and exports. It is still the easiest way to move large amounts of goods throughout the United States.”

Believe it not, on the building side of the workflow chart, commercial retail remains strong. There’s a common reaction to that revelation.

“Are you crazy? Do you see all the online shopping? Are they really building any bricks and mortar retail stores anymore?” Giovenco said. “The answer is yes, because a lot of savvy online retailers realize having one foot in the bricks and mortar world and one foot in the digital world actually creates a more competitive and lucrative business system for them.”

Some of those retailers seek out Bergmann, too.

“We’ve been doing it for 20-plus years, so we are becoming a market leader in how to do retail programmatic work,” Giovenco said. “On the back end of it is the warehousing and distribution. We’ve done over 20 million square feet of warehousing and distribution space across the United States in the last decade, and we are really experts in warehousing and distribution, so clients are finding us.”

There has been significant growth in the solar energy field for Bergmann, and that’s likely to continue as President-elect Joe Biden’s administration looks to phase out reliance on fossil fuels.

“As Biden has indicated, he wants to continue to invest in renewable energies and that’s an area we can continue to grow at and leverage our expertise,” Giovenco said. “Three years ago we started dabbling in it and two years ago we started getting some nice projects. This year has been incredible. The number of clients we are working with has grown exponentially.”

That’s all part of the firm’s overall strategy heading into the next 40 years, during which Giovenco foresees continued partnerships with local municipalities.

“Resiliency is something we’re really going to focus on,” Giovenco said. “Sustainability was a buzzword about a decade ago in our industry. I’m not saying resiliency is the new buzzword but it’s something that’s going to be here for a long, long time because we are constantly going to be up against a lot of disruptive forces in our society, in our weather, in our climate, that will force us to be designing buildings and infrastructure that are resilient.”

But one element of the operation still trumps all, he said: the employee.

“All the technology and all the gizmos in the world still don’t replace the people side of it,” Giovenco said. “The successful companies, and hopefully we are one of them, are the companies that continually invest in their people and make them the main reason they exist. Our people are our only resource and our only asset.”

koklobzija@bridgetowermedia.com / (585) 653-4020