

Business First of Buffalo - May 26, 2008

<http://buffalo.bizjournals.com/buffalo/stories/2008/05/26/smallb1.html>



Friday, May 23, 2008

75 years on the job

Buffalo engineering, surveying company has diverse portfolio

Business First of Buffalo - by [James Fink](#) Business First

People driving across the Grand Island bridges owe a debt of gratitude to **Nussbaumer & Clarke Inc.**

For that matter, so do residents of Amherst, Hamburg and Evans every time they flush their toilets.

Road work and sanitary sewer systems are just a few examples of the diversity of Nussbaumer & Clarke.

The Hamburg company is one of the region's oldest engineering and surveying firms, having just marked its 75th anniversary. Handling public sector work makes sense for the firm, because one of its namesakes, the late Newell Nussbaumer, at one time served as Buffalo's Department of Public Works commissioner.

"We're diverse, but we've never forgotten our roots," said Michael Sendor, company president.

Company history: In 1933, Nussbaumer and Irving Clarke, left their jobs as engineers and surveyors with the former **George Diehl Co.** In the middle of the Depression, it was a risky move.

The two good friends had wanted to branch out on their own and when New York state passed a law in 1933 that allowed engineering companies to form their own corporation, they jumped at the chance. In a very amicable deal, Nussbaumer and Clarke bought out Diehl's existing contracts and interests and opened the doors on their own firm.

During the past 75 years, Nussbaumer & Clarke has amassed an impressive array of projects and clients. The firm was hired by the Town of Amherst to do the engineering and surveying work for its massive sewage treatment plant. It was also hired by the state to do the surveying work during the construction of the Kensington Expressway and all of the roads around the University at Buffalo's Amherst campus.

More recently, Nussbaumer & Clarke worked on the construction of HSBC Arena and the downtown Buffalo headquarters for **New Era Cap Co.** The company is currently doing engineering and surveying work on an urban residential subdivision at the corner of Jefferson Avenue and Sycamore Street. The homes should be ready later this year.

Who's who: In addition to Sendor, other members of the firm's hierarchy include Michael Smith, CEO; Michael Borowiak, vice president - surveying; Marie Nowak, vice president-engineering; and Margaret Lawless, chief financial officer.

The firm has 65 workers including seven licensed land surveyors, the most of any firm west of Syracuse.



Jim Courtney

Michael Sendor, left, and Michael Smith engineer marketing for Nussbaumer & Clarke Inc.

[View Larger](#)

75 years on the job - Business First of Buffalo:

Sendor and Smith bought the company in 2000. Sendor has been with Nussbaumer & Clarke for 23 years and Smith has been working for them for 15 years, Sendor is licensed to practice in six states.

Annual billings: \$5.78 million in 2007, on pace to equal that in 2008.

Public vs. private: Nussbaumer & Clarke's work load is split about 60 percent on public infrastructure works like roads, water and sewer lines. The remaining 40 percent is private sector projects and of the private work about 25 percent is connected to residential projects.

Approximately 90 percent of their work is in Western New York, although they are doing some surveying work in portions of Pennsylvania.

"Work goes up and down in various cycles," Smith said. "Some years the surveying end is way up and engineering is down. Other years, it is the other way around. Diversity is the key. That way, you always have work going on."

Clients: **New York State Department of Transportation**, the Erie County Water Authority, the Town of Ripley, the Village of Kenmore, **NRG Energy**, U.S. Energy Development Corp., Holimont Ski Club and the law firm of **Sargent & Collins** LLP.

Tough times: Even with a fragile local economy, Sendor said Nussbaumer & Clarke's billings have increased 20 percent in the last three years. He credits that to long standing relationship the firm has built up with its client base.

Sendor noted that 80 percent of its billings comes from repeat customers.

"There is work out there," Smith said. "You might have to work a little bit harder in Buffalo to get it, but it's there. That's why it is so important to establish business relationships."

Sendor is a member of 23 different business groups ranging from serving on the board of the **Buffalo Niagara Partnership** to joining the **Hamburg Chamber of Commerce** and the Niagara Frontier Land Surveyor's Association.

"People tend to give work to people they know and are comfortable with," Sendor said.

Selling out: Both Sendor and Smith admit that from time-to-time, they've been approached by about selling Nussbaumer & Clarke. The answer is always the same: "Thanks, but no thanks."

They point out they are only the fourth set of owners the firm has had in the past 75 years.

"We could easily sell out, but we think it is important to keep Nussbaumer & Clarke in local hands and ownership," Smith said. "We can make decisions and move quickly if we have to. You don't want to be in a position where you have to go to a corporate headquarters in New York City for every single decision."

Coming home: Interestingly, eight of the last 10 people hired by Nussbaumer & Clarke were former residents who wanted to move back to the region.

"There are jobs and opportunities here," Sendor said. "We're glad we could hire them."

Nussbaumer & Clarke Inc.

Gateway Business Center
3556 Lake Shore Road
Suite 500

Buffalo, NY 14219-1494

Phone: (716) 827-8000

Web site: www.nussclarke.com

All contents of this site © American City Business Journals Inc. All rights reserved.