

The Business Journal (Minneapolis/St. Paul) - January 19, 2004
<http://twincities.bizjournals.com/twincities/stories/2004/01/19/focus3.html>

THE BUSINESS JOURNAL MINNEAPOLIS • ST. PAUL

IN DEPTH: COMMERCIAL REAL ESTATE

From the January 16, 2004 print edition

Close Up

Tom McGough Jr. moves five-generation family contractor into new services

Scott D. Smith
Staff reporter

McGough Cos. wants to be known first and foremost as a construction company. But Tom McGough Jr. has pushed the family firm to offer a full slate of real estate services.

He has advocated new directions for the construction company, which has a history that stretches back five generations to Ireland. McGough Cos. now provides corporate services, development and facility management.

McGough said it wasn't like he was telling his dad, CEO Tom McGough Sr., how the business needed to be run. Instead, clients kept requesting services such as developing a building for them or managing their properties.

Tom McGough Jr. felt no pressure from his father to join the family business. The present Roseville-based firm was incorporated in 1956 by Peter McGough and his six sons. Today, three of the six are still active in the business: Tom Sr., Leo and Larry.

"I certainly wasn't encouraged at all," said Tom McGough Jr. "I was told it was a brutal business and that I should stay out of it."

But construction was in his blood. As a kid, McGough liked to build model buildings. Now, as a 43-year-old executive, he is an unpretentious guy who loves the details of making buildings.

McGough started working as a laborer when he was in his teens. He attended the University of St. Thomas for two years before transferring and completing his degree in construction at Arizona State University in 1983. He was offered a job with another firm in California, but he decided to return home to Minnesota.

Though he was the boss's son, he didn't start in the front office. He continued working as a carpenter and was promoted from foreman to superintendent to project manager over the course of several years. He joined the front office in his 30s and was named chief operating officer and president of development about five years ago.

Though McGough has pushed for a broader mission, he wants to keep true to the company's builder roots. "We want to be known as a contractor first, not a developer."

McGough isn't a self-promoter -- in fact a disinterest in publicity is a family tradition -- but he does brag about the company, saying it has the best people and builds the best buildings.

The firm has a client list that reads like a who's who of the Twin Cities corporate world: 3M Co., General Mills Inc. and Medtronic Inc., to name a few. McGough's philosophy is to stick close to clients and provide them

with the best quality services possible, he said.

The firm is constructing some of the highest-profile projects around town, including the new Guthrie Theater and Bloomington Central Station, a 45-acre project surrounding a new light rail station two blocks east of the Mall of America.

Monty Talbert, principal at engineering firm Michaud Cooley Erickson in Minneapolis, has worked with the McGough family for about 30 years. Talbert is impressed with the energy and enthusiasm Tom Jr. has brought to the firm.

"There's no question that Tom has brought different ideas and areas of focus into the organization," Talbert said.

McGough has three children and manages to indulge his passion for cars.

The "problem" started, he said, because he grew up near the Minnesota State Fairgrounds and fell in love with the classic cars displayed there. He now has about eight classic cars with which he tinkers.

McGough's latest obsession was written up in American Rodder magazine. He is attempting to blend Formula 1 design with the bulbous body of a 1940 Willys Speedway coupe.

Fun for McGough is designing the custom components that must be made from scratch to make such a combination possible. The writers of the magazine say that McGough's process "may well be the most advanced-technology street-rod construction project we've ever seen."

When asked about how much his car will cost when finished, McGough said that's something he definitely doesn't want to see in print. "I have huge issues with cars."

ssmith@bizjournals.com / (612) 288-2107

© 2004 American City Business Journals Inc.

→ [Web reprint information](#)

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