

## **Our First 20 Years** **by Bruce G. Boncke, PE, President**

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In the bigger picture, 20 years is not a long period of time and it sure has gone by fast. Yet, in terms of what we have seen in the development industry and in community planning, it often seems like a long time. Personally, with a career going back nearly 40 years, I am now providing services for a number of grandchildren of clients I served in my early years. That puts things in perspective and stirs up a lot of emotions, for me. I think a lot about "the good old days", how grateful I am for the loyalty our clients have shown, but more importantly, I wonder what the future will bring for all of us. It is somewhat ironic that we initiated our business plan shortly after "black Monday", October 19, 1987. Twenty years later, two major recessions, the S&L crisis, and significant regulatory changes seem to have brought us full circle. But, we have also learned all these issues are cyclical.

Have we accomplished our goals over these 20 years? Yes, and more! I believe the best way to describe the character of the firm is: a small firm concentrating on the big picture. When we started the firm, we promised our clients that we would not only provide a high level of planning and design services; we would be their advocate on the bigger picture. One day, we are presenting excellent projects to communities and regulatory agencies. The next day, we are working with community leaders and regulators to create good land use policy or fight harmful regulations. On another day, we are working on training programs for community decision makers, regulators and our clients. Our passion for our clients' projects have taken us down a lot of roads, on the big picture.

I have to admit that one thing we didn't see coming, when we started business, is the drastic changes in attitude toward development in the eyes of the public, and therefore many community leaders. In 20 years, the development approval process has greatly changed from incentive based to punitive based. In 20 years, the government has put in place an incredible amount of regulations without enough regulatory staffing to keep up with permitting. There is no greater example of this than in environmental regulatory permitting, where an extensive amount of time is lost in paper shuffling rather than true environmental protection. We believe our solution to these issues is education. So, while it has always been an important part of our advocacy efforts, education of our community leaders and regulators will be an important part of our company culture for the next 20 years. We have always approached our services to be part of the solution, not the problem.

As I close, I have a quick story. I play alto sax in our Community Band with a friend who is 90+ years old. He has served our community as a teacher, Planning Board member, Town Board member, Judge and probably many other positions I don't know about. We had a conversation about his serving on the first Planning Board in the Town in 1957! I was barely starting my education at that time! His involvement started around 1954, pre-zoning, and he helped develop the first zoning ordinance. Talk about the "good old days" and simpler times! He said the toughest things they had to deal with were barns, trailer parks, and gravel pits. While he has not served for many years, imagine what he has seen in the community development process over these 50 years. For me, it puts our 20 years in perspective, and while we can't turn back the clock, I hope we can always learn from our history as we look to the future.