

Memphis engineering, architecture firm has impact on citizens across region

By Jonathan Devin
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Michael Young is a little more confident about surviving the bad economy than most company heads. The 60-year-old president of the engineering and architecture firm Allen & Hoshall said his company has already weathered four economic downturns since it was founded in 1915.

"1974 was the first downturn in my career but we've always emerged intact and stronger," said Young, who joined Allen & Hoshall in 1972. "This one is worse because it affects all aspects of the economy, but we've got a plan to get through it and grow."

Allen & Hoshall was founded by Thomas Allen, who later became the president of what is now Memphis, Light, Gas & Water Division, and Robert Hoshall who became a partner in the 1920s. Both are now deceased.

Headquartered in Memphis, the company has 10 offices in Nashville, Chattanooga, Knoxville, Birmingham, Hernando; Jackson, Mississippi; and Jackson, Tenn. Their strategic plan, adopted in July 2008, includes doubling their size over seven years with possible expansions into Texas and Georgia.

The company has three practice divisions including a civil and public works group, which oversees planning and construction of roads, bridges, and parking lots; an electric/utility division, which designs utility substations and conducts studies for distributors of TVA power; and a building systems group, which designs the structural engineering and air conditioning/ heating systems for buildings.

The three divisions account for nearly equal portions of the company's revenue.

Young said that the diversity of projects has helped the company thrive through changing economic tides.

"One of our greatest attributes as a company is that we can do so many things," said Young. "The electric/utility division especially is something you don't see very often in an engineering firm."

Another strength is being able to attract new talent.

Each year Allen & Hoshall accepts eight to 10 interns from the engineering colleges at the University of Memphis and Christian Brothers University, many of whom stay on after graduation.

"We'll bring in bright, young university engineering students for a summer program and if it seems to work, we'll have them work all they want," said Young. "By the time they graduate we've figured out if it's a good match. We've attracted a lot of talent that way."

Student interns then get a chance to work with some of the firm's high-profile clients like Baptist Memorial Health Care, the City of Germantown, and Memphis International Airport.

In the mid 1940s, Allen & Hoshall designed the master plans for the Naval Air Station at Millington. Much of the infrastructure for the casinos of Tunica County and the new Tunica Airport were managed by Allen & Hoshall as well.

On March 1, the company began work on the rebuilding of the aging runway 927 at the Memphis International Airport, which is used by FedEx.

Larry Cox, president and CEO of the Memphis-Shelby County Airport Authority, which owns the airport, said that Allen & Hoshall will serve as project managers for the \$49 million dollar project.

"They will review the work of designers to make sure they're consistent with the master plan," said Cox, noting that other engineering firms will also work on the runway.

"We've been very pleased to work with them. They always have very qualified management and they work with us in a very collaborative fashion. We wouldn't have continued to work with them for so long if they hadn't done a good job."

Young said the company's long relationship with the airport is a source of pride for his 100 employees because so many people use it.

"Professionally it's very rewarding," said Young. "What we do has an impact on the lives of citizens."

Young expects the company's 2009 revenue stream to be similar to that of 2008, which did not grow, but didn't suffer losses either. He said that contracts with his firm can be anywhere from \$2,000 to \$200,000.

In the meantime the company is spending conservatively.

"We're just controlling our costs and expenses a lot more than we ever have before," said Young. "You know what they say. If you watch the pennies, the dollars will take care of themselves."

Thousands of Memphians will get a taste of Allen & Hoshall's work next year when the Mid-South Fair opens in Tunica County. Young said his firm is handling the grading, draining, water and sewer lines, and utilities for the 150 acre site as well as mechanical and electrical engineering for the some of the buildings.

"It's fun to bring this thing out of the ground," said Young.

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