

Changing of the guard at Passero Associates



Photo by Passero Associates

Passero Associates was honored with several awards for the design of the Gateway Canopy at Greater Rochester International Airport.

By KEVIN OKLOBZIJA

With a combined 77 years of service at Passero Associates, the three members of the executive committee — two newcomers, one holdover — are poised to maintain a 48-year tradition of excellence at the firm.

But new CEO Andrew Holesko, new president Jess Sudol and longtime chief financial officer David Passero also know growth is essential, and that innovation will play a key role in serving client needs while also attracting and retaining young talent.



Holesko

Holesko and Sudol officially moved into their roles at the beginning of April. Holesko, who also heads aviation services for the firm, fills the vacant CEO position while Sudol, formerly vice president of Passero's civil engineering sector, succeeds the retiring John Caruso.

"We have an airport planner, a finance officer and a civil engineer running the company," Holesko said. "The three of us have different views and different strengths, and the fact we get along well and can collaborate — and agree to disagree — and then still come up with the best solution to move forward, that's really what makes it work."

Along with the new executive team, Passero's board of directors has three new members: Peter Wehner, who is director of architecture services; Jeffrey Bonecutter, who is director of Midwest aviation; and Bradley Wentz, who is director of Southeast aviation. David Savage, director of municipal survey services, will remain on the board until his retirement in December.

The executive team doesn't have any intention of reinventing the wheel, especially since the firm has a stellar reputation for quality and service.

Instead, their blueprint for the next five years — Vision 2025 — includes continuing to do what they do well while placing an emphasis on staff development and company growth. Passero Associates currently employs 110 over seven offices, with between 80 and 85 employees in Rochester.

"There's a focus on growing in markets we do well in currently, expanding our service lines and looking at opportunities to expand geographically," said Sudol, who has been with Passero since 2002. "But at the same time we're focused on staffing needs and employee satisfaction. We need to grow in order to provide opportunities for staff development."



Sudol

They won't simply expand for the sake of adding employees or markets, though.

"Growth with profitability is where you really have to be at," said Passero, who has been with the company 34 years. "You can grow yourself to bankruptcy. We like to call it controlled growth, and that's what Vision 2025 allows. It allows the younger people here to see what their future is at Passero."



Passero

Part of that future involves drone technology. Whereas airport planning and renovation has been a hallmark of Passero Associates for 40 years, a different facet of aviation is now used for design and inspection.



Savage

"Everything from infrastructure to mapping and thermal imaging, the drone technologies are helping literally every department within the firm," said Holesko, who is based at Passero's St. Augustine, Fla., office. "Private, municipal, airports, every department is deploying drones inside of buildings and outside of buildings."



Bonecutter

The firm flies four drones, and they are very specialized.



Wentz

"We have a drone that does thermal imaging," said Holesko, who has been with the firm for a quarter century. "It flies around the exterior of the building and determines where you're getting energy and heat loss. We also have an interior drone that flies inside buildings, arenas and large, tall structures. It goes up and does an inventory assessment of overhead systems; lights, sprinkler systems, roofing systems, that you simply couldn't get to with a person."



Wehner

Another drone assists in three dimensional imagery.

"We're actually flying drones to do survey-level accuracy so that we can design from the data that we possess from the mapping," Holesko said. "We can literally

fly into an open field, do the mapping, and then show somebody exactly what their future building will look like in that open field, almost to the point that you can't tell the difference between our image and what a real building would look like."

Aviation continues to be a major sector for the firm, making up around 40 percent of revenue, but architecture has seen significant growth, Sudol said.

"Architecture has grown significantly over the last few years," he said. "Aviation used to be 50 to 60 percent. Aviation hasn't shrunk, it's just that our architecture and other service lines have grown pretty rapidly."

Part of that growth has come through work in the affordable housing field. Passero currently is designing PathStone's re-creation of the former Sears Store at Skyview on the Ridge in Irondequoit into affordable senior housing.

The need for quality affordable housing has become even more apparent during the coronavirus pandemic.

"The coronavirus certainly highlighted a very significant gap in housing opportunities for certain demographics," Sudol said. "Myself and our employees get a lot of satisfaction out of helping those communities, so that's an area we would like to continue to grow."

Passero handles much of the project, from design, architecture and engineering to securing local code approvals and overseeing construction.

"Our clients come to us with a piece of land and rely on us to come up with an idea that could transform that into a project that, first, is feasible from an economic standpoint, and second, that could also impact communities," Sudol said.

Student housing is also an area with growth potential, especially since the COVID-19 crisis has forced schools to re-examine dormitory and apartment-style living.

Passero has teamed with University Student Living and Christa Construction on APEX, a student housing facility adjacent to the campus of Rochester Institute of Technology. Some design elements are perfect for what may be a new way of constructing student living quarters.

"There's a lot of density in (current) student housing; several students in same bedroom," Sudol said. "At APEX, each student has their own room, each student has their own bathroom. It's almost like their mini unit within their bigger unit, so there's a lot less density from that perspective, a lot more control should anything ever happen again."

It's not just the living quarters that provide separation, either.

"We also install individual mechanical systems so each unit has its own condensing unit, its own furnace to keep separation there and avoid cross-contamination," Sudol said. "We look into vertical circulation points, things like spreading out elevators so they're not all in the same spot."

"COVID has influenced some of our decisions. Where we may have been on the fence, now we generally tend to move in a different direction."

That, of course, can provide for growth opportunities within the firm.

"We have so much talent here at Passero, across all demographics," Sudol said. "If you provide those people with opportunity, and if they collectively reach their potential, the benefit to the firm as a whole will be tremendous."

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