



A bridge to success

Engineer at heart, Duprey stresses collaboration among employees as leader of CPL

By KEVIN OKLOBZIJA

You had to figure Dan Duprey Jr. was going places based on how quickly he was taking charge of the job site with his first employer.

Fresh out of college and armed with a degree in civil engineering from Tri-State University in Angola, Ind., Duprey was hired as a project engineer with the Indiana Department of Transportation in 1980. Bridge work was his specialty.

His first in-the-field assignment involved construction on Meridian Street of a span over Pleasant Run Creek on the south side of Indianapolis.

Every morning, the management team would go over the blueprints and proceed with the next step of construction. As work progressed, the area engineer gave Duprey more responsibility. Duprey eagerly accepted.

"Are you sure you're ready for this?" Duprey was asked.

"I got it," he said confidently.

With blueprints in hand, Duprey was front and center when the footings were poured. And when the angled abutments were erected.

And when the contractor placing the steel beams for the bridge deck came down with some interesting news. The steel was the wrong size; too short.

Uh-oh.

"No problem, huh?" Duprey's boss asked.

It turns out the specs on the plans were incorrect. Someone had miscalculated. "And I was going by the wrong dimensions," he said.

Lesson learned. Always double-check.

Nearly 40 years later, Duprey can tell that story with fondness.

On the way to the top, there will always be trials and tribulations. It's how you deal with them, how you persevere, that ultimately matters.

Success stories, however, far outweighed any speed bumps in his career. That's why Duprey has been with Clark Patterson Lee for 30 years and is in his fourth year as president and chief operating officer.

The Rochester-based architecture, engineering and planning firm specializes in design services in health care, municipal, transportation and academic sectors. Duprey has been a part of CPL's growth and contributions to public infrastructure since 1988.

He left the Indiana DOT to join CPL's forerunner, Clark Engineers, in 1988 as a bridge inspector. Then he started working on design. Not long after, he became a project manager. Soon he was invited to become a shareholder, and then he was named to the board of directors. In 2015 he was named president and COO.

"I started inspecting bridges," the 60-year-old Duprey said, "and the next thing you know, it's been 30 years."

He still has plenty of work to do, though. Maybe that's because the words of a fellow Indiana DOT co-worker still echo in his mind.

The late Francis Henson, a district engineer, was last in the line of command. He would need to give his blessing before any project was OK'd for public use.

"He was a salt-of-the-earth guy; he didn't own a TV," Duprey said. "He'd come out to the job and he'd do the final inspection, and he'd always find something, like a loose bolt on a guardrail."

"And he always said, 'The day you think they can't get along without you is the day they don't need you.'"

They've become words by which to work. As president and COO, Duprey

works closely with the IT group, the chief financial officer and the marketing group.

He doesn't hide in his office, however.

"He's incredibly hands-on," said Jennifer Michniewicz, who works in the Buffalo office and is principal associate in CPL's transportation division.

While Michniewicz was recently away on vacation, Duprey was filling in on some of her work.

"Because he's involved day-to-day, it was a seamless transition for him to jump in and address client concerns and employee concerns while I was gone," she said. "When I got back, I said, 'Thank you so much for covering for me,' and he said, 'Honestly, I kind of like the engineering work.'"

When Duprey started with Clark, he was one of 25 employees. Now CPL has 13 offices in four states (New York, North and South Carolina and Georgia) and employs around 340 people. The most recent addition came via the acquisition of Greensboro-based Moser Mayer Phoenix Associates in October. They expect to add another office over the summer.

"How big is too big?" Duprey asked. "There's no number. In order to maintain success and prosperity, you have to continue to grow."

"But we're careful to not overdo it. We don't want to disrupt our culture."

That CPL culture is one of collaboration and fun, Duprey said.

"When I walk in this door, I feel like I'm walking into my own house, and I want everyone else to feel that way," he said.

When Michniewicz applied to work in the CPL office in Georgia in 2006, Duprey flew down to take part in the interview process.

"I'm from Irondequoit and when Dan came down to interview me, there was just a personal connection," Michniewicz said. "We were talking about the Buffalo Sabres (this was a time when fans enjoyed talking about Western New York's NHL

Dan Duprey Jr.

Title: President and chief operating officer of Clark Patterson Lee

Age: 60

Family: Wife, Mary; daughter, Patty, 32; son Dan III, 30.

Education: B.S. in civil engineering from Tri-State University (now Trine University) in Angola, Ind.

Activities: Avid golfer and snowmobiler. Enjoys taking walks and being outdoors. "My wife is the gardener, I'm the digger."

Quote: "Treat your staff and clients the way you'd like to be treated. It's nothing profound, but I try to preach that."

team) and it felt like there was just such a personal touch."

She was hired in the transportation division, worked in Georgia for three years and then transferred to CPL's Buffalo office in 2009.

Advancement within the firm is a certainly a perk with CPL, Duprey said.

"We want to provide opportunity for growth for our employees," Duprey said, "and we want to provide the best service for our clients."

Among the most visible clients: Monroe County and Rochester General Hospital. CPL is overseeing expansion plans at the Seneca Park Zoo, and they have done the architectural work on RGH's renovation and expansion.

Anyone driving around downtown Rochester has probably driven through the roundabout at Chestnut and Broad streets just east of the Five Star Bank Building.

Not sexy, but necessary and efficient.

"They're all meaningful public infrastructure projects," Duprey said.

Bridge inspection is part of the work done by CPL. The engineers are inspecting all city, county and village bridges in the Hornell region, and some in the Buffalo region. They have the contract for the annual inspection of the Peace Bridge, which connects downtown Buffalo with Fort Erie, Ontario, Canada.

That's a two-week project for three two-person crews.

"You can't stop traffic and you still have to get to everything," Duprey said.

He's quick to reassure that while terms like structurally deficient and functionally obsolete are used when grading bridges, the spans aren't about to fall down. "It means the railing may not be up to current standards, or the lanes or the shoulder width don't meet current standards," he said.

During inspection there isn't a bolt or seam or girder that isn't examined.

"We get to within an arm's length of every piece of those bridges," he said. "I know the level of detail they get looked at every year."

His first duties with CPL may have in many ways provided him the most satisfaction. Bridges have always been his passion. Growing up in the Syracuse suburb of Cicero, he could stare in awe of a bridge.

"My mom always wanted me to be an engineer," he said.

The aptitude test he took in school told him mother knew best. He had an affinity for math and science, and test results suggested he should go to school to be an engineer.

He's glad he listened.

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