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Generations of Success

How One Family Owned Business Carries on a Passion for Building

BY HELEN NOVAK

Creating a Legacy

With his humble roots as a masonry contractor in suburban Massachusetts, one could reasonably speculate that Italian immigrant Peter Consigli never imagined that in 100 years his great-grandsons would be leading a construction management firm currently ranked as the 78th largest in the country, with gross annual revenues more than \$633 million, a bonding capacity of \$1 billion, and more than 600 employees building projects for private and public clients throughout New England and New York.

Commonly quoted family owned-businesses statistics state that 30 percent make it to the second generation, 10-15 percent to the third, and three to five percent to the fourth generation. Luckily for Consigli, the work ethic, integrity, family cohesiveness and passion for building that began with Peter and his sons in 1905 are clearly alive and well today. Into its fourth generation of leadership, Consigli is one of the few family owned businesses that have not only endured, but flourished.

Until the early 1990s, the small construction firm operated primarily in and around Milford, Massachusetts, a western suburb of Boston, providing building and masonry work, including snowplowing, utility work and grave excavation for all the local cemeteries. As each new generation took the reins, the following generation would cut its teeth in the business by plowing snow in the winters and digging graves during the summers.

In the mid-1990s, at the age of 28, Anthony Consigli followed in his father's footsteps and took on the role as president. Shortly

thereafter, his younger brother Matthew joined as vice president. At the time, the recession was hitting the building industry pretty hard, and Anthony and his brother knew that the old business model wasn't going to work any longer. Consigli had to grow or die.

Standing Apart

Several things needed to happen. In order to ensure the company's continued health and growth, the brothers knew that clear competitive distinctions needed to be identified and marketed to prospective clients. Consigli's significant differentiator always has been its ability to self-perform work in the field. With specialized trades on staff, Consigli could exert

more control over the job sites, which meant more control over the budget, housekeeping and safety, as well as schedule.

By building on the strength of its self-perform work, Consigli could deliver old-world, hands-on craftsmanship unmatched by many construction managers in the industry—who mostly outsourced that skilled labor. By combining construction management with genuine builders, particularly in complex restoration projects, Consigli would be unique in the building industry.

Another distinction is the consistent involvement of Anthony and Matthew in every aspect of the business. This keeps the decision-making process more nimble, more responsive and efficient, giving the feel of a smaller company



while offering all the resources and technologies of a larger, multinational company. The result is a better experience for clients.

Anthony explains, "We recently went through a negotiation on a very difficult project with a client that does a lot of work with a lot of different firms. The entire negotiation took an hour, with just me going through all the points directly with the client—no attorneys. At the end the client said, 'This is the easiest client negotiation we've ever had.' Usually there are layers of people internally, another construction manager and other lawyers involved, and it can make for a very cumbersome process. But for Consigli, it's either me or my brother; there's no one else. We are the ultimate decision-makers."

Focusing on Your Passion

Early in his career at Consigli, Anthony served as project manager on a utility project that did not turn out well. Local papers publicized the failure. Although quite painful, and momentarily damaging to the company's reputation, this seminal moment would help to bring about significant positive change. Anthony decided that the company would no longer do utility and civil work—the renewed focus would be on what the people at Consigli loved to do the most, and that was building buildings. Because masonry represented the company's initial roots and has continued to be a mainstay throughout its history, a specialty was built around building restoration, which remains a primary market today.

"One of the things that I see in our industry is that as a family owned builder in New England, Consigli competes a lot against larger, pure construction managers, who are very good at what they do. But I think that one of the differences a client might see on our projects is that we approach a job with a bit more emotion and passion, care and concern. We love the building process. For us, a project is a great opportunity to build something that's going to last for a long time. We get excited about that. We don't look at our projects as a job number on a financial transaction sheet; we look at them as pictures, in plans, and relationships, and with enthusiasm—and that brings about a whole different level of excitement to a project and makes for a better experience. We want to get to the end of the job and hear the client say, 'Hey that was great, I want to do that again,'" says Anthony.

Living by Your Values

Construction is an inherently risky business, and problems crop up with every project. Consigli prepares for those situations ahead of time by holding fast to some non-negotiable principles. Putting safety first is one, providing quality workmanship is another, and accountability is probably the most important.

A few years ago, Anthony was at a town meeting and saw someone he had met before and felt he should know, but couldn't place. He also vaguely remembered that the prior experience with this person was not good. The woman approached him and said, "It's so nice to see you Anthony! We had such a good experience working with you!" Then it all came back to him. Several years earlier, there was a large building renovation project in which the new windows were beginning to show signs of future leaking. And although there was no demand from the client or claim to replace them, the superintendent on the job notified Anthony and recommended full replacement of all the windows. Anthony agreed, saying, "It was the right thing

to do. This was a building that was going to be there for another 100 years, and we certainly didn't want our name to be associated with a building with windows that were leaking." Anthony kept one of those replaced windows. It sits in his office as a reminder—to not only uphold the quality of work, but also to remember that a quick response and care for the work must be of primary importance over profit and loss. That woman at the town meeting didn't remember the problems on the project; she just remembered that Consigli took care of everything, and that the building turned out great.

"It all boils down to integrity, honesty and doing what you say you are going to do—which was something my great-grandfather, grandfather and father were committed to," says Anthony.

Planning Ahead

Committed to systematic planning, the brothers had the patience and perseverance to plant the seeds for future work to put Consigli in the healthy position to pursue projects strategically in the down economy. Despite the strength of some building markets in the mid-1990s, they were determined to diversify Consigli's work to weather any future market dips. They pursued federal work, while other firms were busy building high-rise luxury condominiums. When Consigli won four significant federal projects in 2008, the building industry hit a standstill in other markets, and competitors began scrambling to pursue federal and state work. Well, Consigli was already there.

The economic downturn also caused increased enrollments at public colleges, which now needed



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renovations and additions. With Consigli's solid experience working for institutions and private colleges, they were well-positioned to take on this new influx of work. And, the company's healthy backlog enabled it to offer excellent employment opportunities to some of the most experienced construction management and tradespeople in New England who were being laid off. By actively recruiting professionals in a variety of specialties, Consigli was able to fill many skill sets in its workforce and maintain its talent and volume of work by broadening its reach into new markets, such as life sciences.

Reinventing and Reinvesting

Reinvesting in the company also created the opportunity to grow during a recession and take advantage of the next trends in building and growth markets. Committed to taking calculated risks and reinvest in the business, Consigli acquired a small construction firm in the Hudson Valley region of New York in 2009. This enabled the company to expand its geographic reach beyond New England in an area that offered much in the way of academic, historic, health care and cultural projects, which represent some of the company's core specialties. By this time, the firm already had thriving offices in Portland, Maine, and Connecticut.

In order to keep growing and evolving, Anthony and Matthew knew they had to challenge themselves and their employees to continually embrace advanced building technologies and tools such as Building Information Modeling (BIM) and Vela, and to innovate and devise solutions to the most complex construction problems.

"BIM provides one of the biggest positive changes for our industry in a long time. We are promoting it internally and externally as a better tool to plan our work. Whether it's in the coordination of the mechanical or electrical systems, or it's in thinking about the schedule, or just allowing the superintendent

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- Anthony Consigli

to think about the sequence of how they are going to put their work together. I think it is going to be something that we continue to promote hard and invest in, and I think that it's really one of the catalysts for positive change that we've seen in this industry in a long time," says Anthony.

Growing Future Leaders

Since the formation of Consigli, its mission has always been one of customer service and building great buildings, but it evolved in later years to also focus more heavily on its employees and on becoming one of the best places to work in New England. As a result of this focus, Consigli received both the Massachusetts and Central Massachusetts Family Business Awards in 2009 and has been ranked one of Massachusetts's "Best Place to Work" for six years running and, in 2011, was named Maine's #1 Best Places to Work in the large firm category.

The current company mission, "Consigli will be the most desired contractor to work with and for," embodies values that emphasize world-class treatment of employees and clients. This mission reflects the Consigli family belief that employees who enjoy coming to work will take greater pride in their performance, and as a result, will give clients the best experience possible when they choose to work with Consigli.

Consigli's approach to business and to creating a work environment that empowers employees has built a culture of responsibility to the company, its clients and to each other. Embracing the mantra of creating "Raving Fans" of clients and making that part of the company directive has sparked new

meaning behind client service and quality work. Building teams have a renewed sense of urgency and improved work ethic.

"Our people have a passion for building above all else. We thrive on complex projects that challenge our creativity and call for innovation. We know we must compete and earn our work every day, and that leaders do that best. We know that sustaining our team requires that we recruit, train, mentor and motivate," says Anthony.

Despite the fact that both Anthony and Matthew have many years left in their careers, they have established a formal leadership development program to cultivate future leaders across all departments.

"One of things I am most proud of here at Consigli is the family of people that we built around us over the years. Making sure those people stay committed, stay happy in their work, and enjoy what they do is extremely important," says Anthony. "A big part of leadership is setting goals and then guiding our people and organization to meet those goals. A bigger part of leadership is how we get to those goals. It's about keeping people together when things get difficult. It's about resilience and perseverance during hard times and doing the right thing—showing character and class when it matters."

► **Helen Novak** is public relations manager at Consigli Construction Co., Inc. Based in Milford, Massachusetts, Consigli is a full-service construction manager and general contractor serving academic, health care, institutional, life sciences, corporate, landmark restoration and federal clients throughout New England and New York State. To learn more about Consigli, visit www.consigli.com or contact Helen at hnovak@consigli.com. ▲