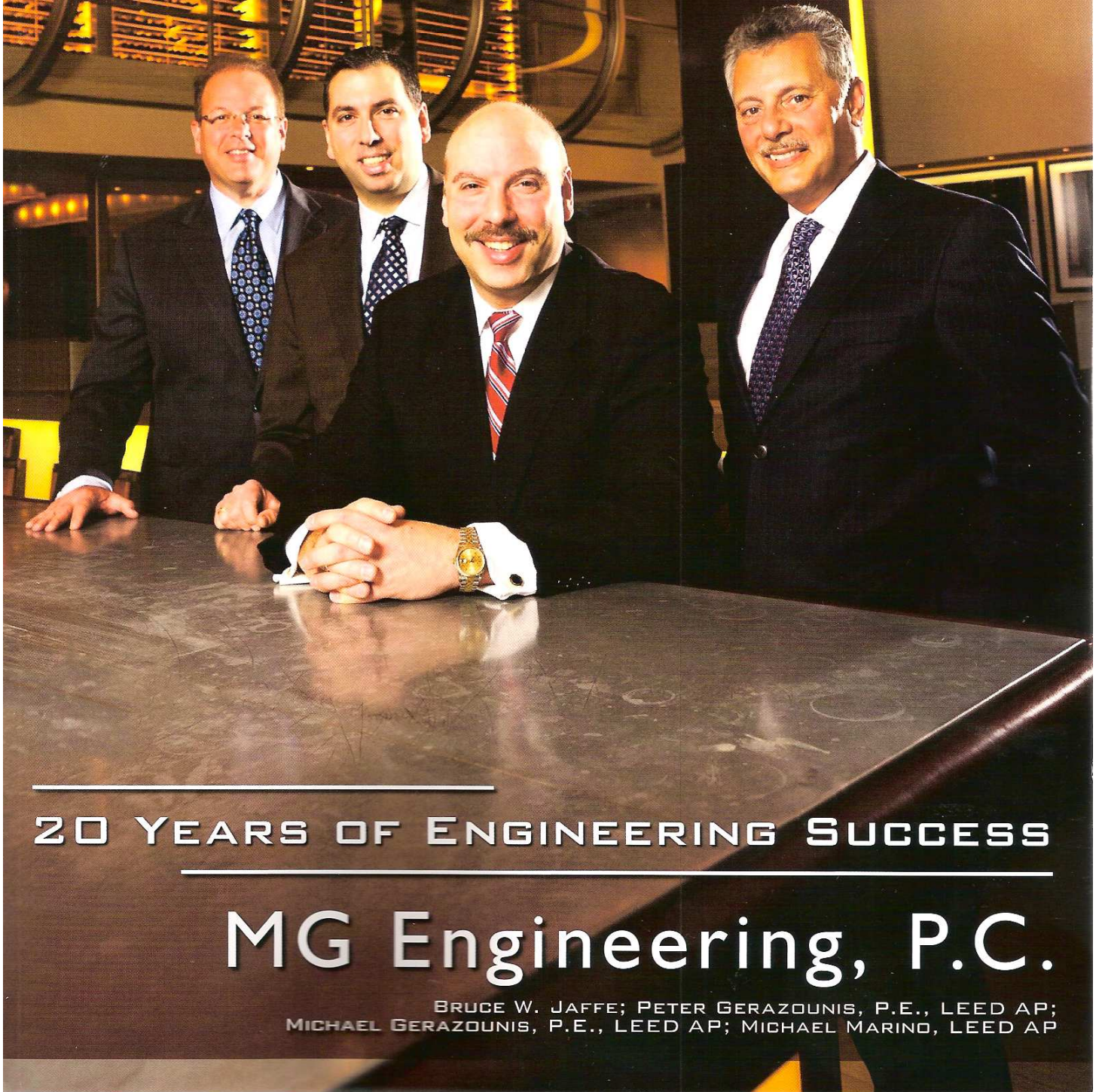


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20 YEARS OF ENGINEERING SUCCESS

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Hiring The Right Developer And Design/Builder

by Ryan Regina,
BIG SKY Enterprises

In today's turbulent economy, any organization looking to start a new construction project faces certain challenges. Choosing the right commercial developer and design/builder, using criterion based on individualized, industry-specific needs, can make the difference between a successful project and a bonafide disaster.

A commercial construction project usually involves one overriding factor above all others: the bottom line. While certainly a critical factor in the decision making process, budget should not be the only one. When cost alone is the primary focus of a project, serious repercussions are likely to follow — poor service, time delays, hidden costs, changes orders and non-existent follow up to name a few.

When vetting commercial developers and design/builders, it's important to consider each and every aspect of the project "life cycle," from the company's own vision to the post-project completion period. Here are a few key life cycle-based hiring considerations:

Budget: Understanding precisely how financial limitations will impact the related financing process at large is far easier when partnering with an organization knowledgeable about commercial construction finance and can walk the customer through each and every step.

Service Scope: The majority of companies offer only a portion of services required, so it's optimal to retain a commercial developer and design/builder with a full solutions, end-to-end project management approach, which offers the benefit of single contact-point project control and accountability.

Development: Many times organizations attempt to serve as project developer only to learn it takes a specialized skill set and years of developer experience to do the job effectively. While development is viewed as exciting and challenging, it's usually underestimated from a time and experience perspective. When developing in the commercial realm, it's important to hire a firm that has a demonstrated track record.

Land/Property Acquisition: The most critical step to a successful land acquisition is a properly structured agreement. All too often organizations forego consultation and enter into a land agreement that doesn't provide them the protection they

need. Ensure the developer and design/build firm you hire has direct experience formulating land agreement documentation.

Architecture: The architecture aspect of a project can make or break the budget if clarity is not achieved in the organizational phase. Problems arise when organizations circumvent organizational and financial assessments and go right to the architect which can lead to multiple plan changes throughout the design phase. A qualified developer and design/builder will work very closely with the architect, along with professional subcontractors who will be performing the work, to ensure project parameters are crystal clear and maximize the chance of the project being completed on time and on budget.

Engineering: A veteran developer and design/builder will partner with an engineering firm based on two criteria: The first is an exceptional relationship with town, borough or city personnel to better ensure required township approvals are secured. The second is firm size. Usually the bigger the firm, the higher the cost and longer the work turnaround time.

Legal: Hiring legal help is very similar to engineering with respect to relationships and understanding requirements of state, county, and local agencies, including laws and ordinances. Legal counsel that knows the players within a particular township can make a project much less turbulent. As a course of business, a full-service commercial developer and design/builder will identify and manage such legal aspects of project to readily work through the red tape.

Construction: Once the design, development and other financial aspects of a project are approved, it's time to build! Having a developer and design/builder on board from the vision stage through project completion means that you don't have to go through the process again. Be sure to take on-site tours of buildings the company has helped design, develop, and build, both new and old.

Client Service: Be sure to assess a firm beyond photographs of a project portfolio. Experienced firms will have a well-honed protocol to minimize surprises and to keep a client satisfied. Much is also said about providing outstanding client service throughout the course of a project and after the project has been completed. It's important to thoroughly interview past clients of the development and design/build firm under consideration and to specifically ask about post-project interactions.

Use this project life cycle-based checklist when hiring a commercial developer and design/builder, and you'll be well on your way to a successful outcome that not only meets, but very well exceed expectations.

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