

THE GREEN PAGES

Engineering firm connects available funding with client need



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When you must deal with pollution and flooding problems on a construction site, you consult an engineer. When you want your project to be built synergistically with its environment, you hire an engineer. When you want to replace aging infrastructure with a 21st-century, sustainable design, you call an engineer. Sounds great, but how do you pay for it?

Meanwhile, when the government wants to empower the private sector to reclaim polluted land or mitigate wetlands to control stormwater, it offers competitive grants. When an investor wants to see more activity in a given industry, he or she packages seed money. When a private foundation wants to fuel a particular cause, it funds projects that do the same. Sounds great, but how do you find them and their money?

THE GREEN SCENE

Barry Isett & Associates (BIA) — as multidiscipline engineers and planners often do — designed a new bridge, except this one consists entirely of paper and knowhow.

In order to cross the divide between available services and available funding, Isett hired Joe Hoffman, a man with 40 years of grantwriting experience. Since that time in 2002, more than \$21 million has made its way to BIA's clients as a result.

"(Hoffman's) ability to do grantwriting is always something I wanted to bring on board," said Barry Isett, firm founder and chairman of the board. Isett knew the recently unemployed Hoffman had

a knack for finding money and had a proven ability to work well with governmental agencies as well as his own staff, so Isett created a position just for him at BIA: manager, grantsmanship and special projects.

Grantwriting is a long, tedious process that can be as intimidating and uncertain as rowing a leaky boat. Until Hoffman arrived, the task was left to whoever was available to collect the data, connect the dots, and fill out an application.

BIA was no different from other engineering firms, paying existing staff members to occasionally help a client apply for specific funding. Too often, however, money was left on the funder's table because no one had the time to go after it or even the knowledge that it existed. Hoffman, meanwhile, had acquired \$20 million for watershed improvement projects and the like on behalf of his former employer, the Berks County Conservancy. There he also addressed environmental regulations and permits and managed all aspects of the awards.

Isett knew truly successful grantwriting would require a dedicated expert with an ability to work the angles. A project manager who is buried in details might overlook nuances that represent obvious funding connections to someone such as Hoffman.

For instance, is there a historic treasure buried on site? Is the location in the middle of an economic development zone? Or a conservation district? Or along a heritage trail?

With an ever-changing economy, it's tough to keep tabs on funding sources. They change with economic conditions, elections and investor whims. Speaking of BIA's clients, Hoffman said, "As opportunities come up, we match their needs to the opportunity." Speaking of his extensive knowledge, "the connections are almost automatic to me now."

Much of Hoffman's work at the firm



Photo Courtesy of Barry Isett & Associates

Pen Argyl neighbors can safely walk to nearby businesses as a result of a grant award.

has helped schools and municipalities. For instance, he worked with the Borough of Pen Argyl to procure \$2.2 million for curb, sidewalk and street repairs in a low- to moderate-income neighborhood. Residents responded by cleaning up their own properties as best they could. The overall character and property values improved, and the benefits carried to the commercial district as residents safely walked to nearby businesses.

Hoffman's environmental conservation experience has given him a keen eye for raising the eco-conscious bar. When a parking lot is needed, for example, he looks to fund the installation of new pervious surface materials instead of the traditional concrete or blacktop.

With the backing of an entire engineering firm, the environment becomes another winner in this arrangement along with Hoffman himself (who gets to continue doing what he loves), Isett (who gets to continue providing for the wellbeing of his clients), and the funder (who gets to see the money being used

for its intended goal).

Hoffman shares his knowledge beyond the firm's client list. He presents to chambers of commerce, at conferences and planning meetings, etc. He meets with nonprofits and for-profits all across the region discuss their options, no strings attached.

However, with nine departments and 95 employees, including a soil scientist, wetlands expert, and a president who is Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certified, most awards result in some kind of work for BIA. Hoffman's success at the Trexlertown office has prompted other BIA offices, such as Hazleton, to begin offering similar services.

The Barry Isett & Associates grantsmanship bridge is an example of outside-the-box thinking that can improve sustainability...for the environment and the economy.

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Photo Courtesy of C.F. Martin & Co.

C.F. Martin & Co. said it intends to seek Bronze Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design certification for its new distribution center in Easton.

New Martin distribution center seeks LEED Bronze status

C.F. Martin & Co. has opened a new distribution center in Easton just 15 minutes from its Nazareth headquarters. The firm said this newly-renovated facility has increased storage and material handling capabilities that are in line with the company's aggressive growth targets.

The decision to open the new Martin Guitar Distribution Center resulted from increased demand for Martin Guitar products worldwide, said the firm.

The new facility was explicitly designed to consolidate goods from several manufacturing sources and redistribute them around the world with increased speed and efficiency, said the firm.

Another focus of the newly designed Martin Guitar Distribution Center was energy conservation. The facility has highly efficient lighting controlled by motion detectors, increased insulation, bicycle racks in its parking area and a walking path; all of which allow Martin to apply for Bronze Level LEED — Leadership in Energy and Environmental Certification.