



The entire staff at Barile Gallagher & Associates Consulting Engineers, P.C., celebrated the opening of their new office in May 2017. It features an open office plan where lots of ideas can flow back and forth between team members.

NEW YORK ENGINEERING FIRM SIMPLIFIES COMPLEX CHALLENGES

Practical solutions and good communication are keys to client retention

by Marge O'Connor

Designing systems to operate buildings efficiently is a complex task. But the folks at *Barile Gallagher & Associates Consulting Engineers, P.C.*, make the process easy for their clients by applying practical engineering solutions that bring their projects to life.

Laurence Barile, President of the firm, learned the importance of practical design from his father, Pat Barile and Pat's partner, Tom Damiano, founders of the firm.

"They taught us that we don't build theoretical structures; we build buildings that people have to live with and maintain

for decades. You want solid calculations and a firm grasp of the theory. But you must stand back and see the big picture. How is the building going to be used? How is the contractor going to install what you're designing? How is the building owner going to maintain the systems?" says Laurence.

BUILT ON A HANDSHAKE

Pat and Tom started the business in 1972 when the economy was down and entrepreneurs like them preferred independence. The firm was originally named Damiano Barile Engineers. In May 2017, it became Barile Gallagher & Associates Consulting Engineers, P.C., to reflect its current leadership.

PHOTO COURTESY OF MAUREEN GATES, SHARP IMAGES PHOTOGRAPHIC

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Laurence Barile, President,
Barile Gallagher & Associates Consulting Engineers, P.C.

“My dad and Tom started the business with a handshake. It was like a marriage. They each had their own ways, but both were service-oriented, strived for quality, and used practical solutions,” says Laurence. Tom retired in 1998 and maintained an office at the firm until 2016 when he passed away. Pat retired in 2010. He visits the office less these days at age 87, but still wants to know the latest news whenever he and Laurence speak.

Laurence got a taste of the business before high school. “I helped organize files and catalogs, and made blueprints. In high school I started drafting, and in college did some light design. I really enjoyed working with my dad but wasn’t sure I wanted to be an engineer. Finally, I went to Manhattan College, got an engineering degree, and worked for a firm in the city for a few years. In 1988, I wanted a new challenge and dad was really busy, so I went back to work for him,” notes Laurence.

He became a partner in 1998. Paul Gallagher, now Vice President, started as a mechanical engineer in 1992 and became a partner in 2008.

EMPHASIZING THE PRACTICAL

Tom and Pat’s approach to business was carried down more by example than directive. “Just observing the way they went about their business

was an incredible education. They never told us to do things a certain way. They explained their thinking and listened to alternate ideas. Fairness and honor were very important to them,” Laurence says.

On the business side, Laurence learned that first and foremost his team is in a service industry.

“Communication really is the linchpin of our business. Our clients come to us for help with complex construction problems, and we use our expertise to bring their projects to life. We must understand the project goals and know what constraints the other team players are working under so our solutions will fit those parameters. Then we have to clearly define the HVAC, plumbing, electrical and fire protection systems the contractors will install and respond to questions

or unexpected field conditions that crop up,” he says.

Laurence and Paul continue to put the founders’ core values into action.

“We hold team meetings once a week to go over what needs to be done on every active project. Paul and I—and all of our associates and engineers—are in constant communication, sharing ideas, deciding on an approach and reviewing successes and failures. Everyone is accountable to everyone else here and to our clients. Yes, we make mistakes. But the only people who don’t make mistakes are ones who aren’t doing anything. Plus, we openly discuss our mistakes with each other. Hidden mistakes become repeated mistakes,” notes Laurence.

He and his team have weathered the peaks and valleys of business



Founders Tom Damiano (left center) and Pat Barile (right center) were business partners for 30 years. Now the next generation, Vice President Paul Gallagher (far left) and President Laurence Barile (far right), are using the high standard of service and practical design skills set by Tom and Pat to move the company forward.



The firm has a long-standing relationship with the Bronxville Union Free School District in New York. Its only school features different classrooms designed for different grade levels and a magnificent performing arts center, shown here.

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Laurence Barile

together. “When the economy was down, we did investigative engineering for the insurance industry related to determining whether a claim was a coverable or non-coverable loss. We hooked up with a national organization, got trained and worked on projects—all of which required a quick turnaround. Through this we also learned a lot about building failures and environmental factors,” he adds.

Of the firm’s 14 members, half have been with the company for more than 10 years, some as long as 20 years. “We’re very much a family type of business. We’ve held onto staff during downturns and all shared the pain. That loyalty has paid off when times are good and we’ve had the same philosophy with our clients. We provide exemplary service and they reward us with loyalty when times are tough,” he says.

RETAINING AND GAINING CLIENTS

In its 45 years of business, the company has grown primarily through word of mouth. Although New York is heavily populated, the industry is not so big, according to Laurence. “You always know someone who knows someone. Plus, we get a lot of visibility through industry organizations, such as the AIA, NSPE, ASHRAE and others. We also support good causes, such as the Boys and Girls Clubs, ACE Mentoring, Yonkers Partners in Education (YPIE), the Lower Hudson Council of School Superintendents Scholarship program, and others,” he says.

The firm works mainly on institutional projects like K-12 schools, higher education, correctional facilities and municipal buildings. It also serves commercial clients on multifamily, office and retail projects.

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Business partners Laurence Barile (far left) and Paul Gallagher (far right) proudly stand with Sue Barile (left center) and Joyce Gallagher (right center) in front of their new headquarters in Pleasantville, N.Y. This location is near the center of town, close to public transportation and within walking distance of multiple restaurants and stores.

No matter the client, service is the biggest factor in retaining business, according to Laurence.

"Sometimes our clients don't really know what they need. So we listen, we ask questions and most importantly, we answer questions. Our clients rely on us and we have long-standing relationships with a number of firms. We've worked with two of our biggest long-term clients through two generations of ownership," he notes.

LEARNING FROM CHALLENGES

Often the best learning experience is a project fraught with challenges. In the early 1990s, the firm worked on the Mid-Hudson Forensic Psychiatric Center in New York, a project

that required the use of AutoCAD. So it was the first project where the company used digital drafting.

The work involved renovation of a structure built of reinforced concrete in the 1920s. It had very low floor-to-floor heights and was to be retrofit with a full HVAC system.

"The project took five years to construct, saw the failure of six or seven contractors, and significantly, the shuttering of the state agency overseeing it. We survived the entire process and the end result was a building we are very proud of. For me, a young engineer at the time, it was a learning experience greater than any in my career. Everything that could

"Our designs have always been practical, well thought out and not wasteful."

Laurence Barile



The sustainable features of the Post Road Elementary School in White Plains, N.Y., minimize energy costs and maximize occupant comfort as shown in the school's attractive library.

be questioned, was. That made me question the most basic things and forced me to validate many of our practices," Laurence says.

SUSTAINABLE APPROACH TO DESIGN

Designing for sustainability is what the firm has always done. The founders were Depression-era children who grew up on the ideology of "waste not, want not" and naturally carried that into the firm's work.

"Our designs have always been practical, well thought out and not wasteful. We find the systems and tools that will yield the greatest benefit for the long-term function of the facility. To us, that is simply good design and that's what sustainability is all about. We started using energy recovery ventilation on projects 10 or 15 years ago because it made sense, not because it earned points on a sustainability checklist," notes Laurence.

Almost 10 years ago, the firm worked on the Post Road Elementary School for the White Plains, N.Y., school district, which achieved an ENERGY STAR rating of 100 out of 100.

"We included geothermal HVAC, daylighting controls, solar thermal domestic hot water generation and energy-recovery technology. That's what we find so interesting, discovering the best approach for each building," says Laurence.

Earlier this year, the firm moved to its new 7,000-square-foot headquarters in Pleasantville, N.Y. This state-of-the-art building shows off the company's sustainable approach. "We knocked down a closed Pizza Hut and re-used the existing foundation, super-insulated it, installed ultra-high



When Post Road Elementary School opened in 2007, the state education department identified it as the most sustainable school building in the state of New York. In its engineering design for the school, Barile Gallagher & Associates Consulting Engineers, P.C. included geothermal HVAC, daylighting controls, solar thermal domestic hot water generation and energy recovery technology—which all function from the mechanical room shown here.

efficiency HVAC and used all LED lighting. We have ample north-facing windows and a 26kW rooftop solar panel array. There is a bus stop in front and a train station a block away. All of us can walk to get lunch, go to the cleaners, get haircuts, etc.," notes Laurence.

After 45 years, in addition to treating everyone with respect and maintaining open communications, the practice of creating efficient, sustainable solutions continues to bring success to the firm and its clients. ☺

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