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Two GBCA members reflect on changes in the construction industry as they celebrate milestone anniversaries

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While the roots of the construction industry in Philadelphia extend as far back as the colonial and revolutionary era, the early 20th century was a time of bustling construction activity in our region. 1918 was a year of particular significance, it is the year that James J. Clearkin, Inc., the family company of GBCA board chairman, Joseph P. Clearkin, was established.

Another year of note was 1954, the year C. Erickson & Sons, Inc., was founded. GBCA board member, Michael G. Erickson is now the president.

Over the past several decades, the construction industry has evolved at a rapid pace — in building innovation, techniques, and technology. Yet executives at both companies agree that a strong team and a commitment to their customers and the communities they serve continue to guide the company.

Read the two interviews below to learn a little more about each company.

James J. Clearkin, Inc.

Joseph P. Clearkin, executive vice president, GBCA board chairman

“It is an honor to be able to carry on in my grandfather’s and my dad’s, Jim Jr.’s, footsteps. Our attention to detail remains the same — and the personal touch when working with James J. Clearkin, Inc. You know that you will always be dealing with a Clearkin in every capacity. “

When was the company founded and by who? James J. Clearkin, Inc., was founded in 1918 by our grandfather, James J Clearkin, Sr.

What type of work did the company do upon inception? Our grandfather was a bricklayer by trade. The company was started as a small bricklaying company.

How has the company grown over the past 100 years? In the '30s and '40 s, the majority of the work was industrial and commercial; then in the '50s and '60s with the baby boom, institutional work flourished with both public and private school work along with church work. In the '80s, health care work was added to our resume, all while keeping our industrial/commercial construction roots. Fire restoration, food Plant construction, office fit-out, retail work, computer room construction and exterior building restoration has continued to be an integral part of our business.

When did you get involved with the company? I started with the company in 1979.

What's the number one lesson you've learned from the business? Honesty with our clients; and never over promise what you can't deliver.

Thoughts about this industry? To continue striving to provide clients with quality, cost-effective construction, as well as the unequaled personal attention that has kept us successful for nearly 100 years. This will hopefully carry us into our second century of service.

C. Erickson & Sons, Inc.

Michael G. Erickson, president, GBCA board member

"Being a builder gives you the unique ability to experience your accomplishments for decades. I can look at the skyline and know we contributed to the success of the city."

When was the company founded and by who?

Charles G. Erickson, Jr. in 1954.

How did the company get started?

Charles was working for a construction company that went out of business. Because of the relationships he had formed, he was able to pick up old clients and build his reputation as a company owner. Fun fact: Charles added "and Sons" while he was starting his family in anticipation of them joining the business. He thought it would give the appearance of longevity.

How has the company grown over the past 65 years?

The company's roots are in interior renovations and we have continued with that as the core of our business. Our first real continuous work was with Reading Railroad Company and the second was Sun Oil. Over time, the company built a diversified portfolio. The largest job completed by the founders was a renovation of the Bellevue Stratford Hotel to the Fairmount Hotel in the late '70s.

I think the real reason we were able to grow is because my father was forced into the office due to injury. It required him to hire good people he could depend on and allowed him to grow relationships and chase new opportunities.

When did you get involved with the company? How did your dad prepare you to one day take over?

I was surrounded by the business my entire life. I grew up sorting nails in barrels from middle school on. I helped over summers and holidays when I became old enough to work in the field. I learned the business from the ground up, performing every position in the field and in the office. I went to Spring Garden College for a degree in construction management and engineering and graduated in 1976. I entered the business full time immediately after graduation. My brother, Charlie, joined the business immediately after high school, eventually to lead us as president. Charlie recently retired and I have now assumed the role of president alongside long-term employees Michael Carullo and Dan McNichol who were elevated to principals of the firm.

Thoughts about this industry?

It's apparent that we have an aging community of skilled craftsman. We, as an industry, have to do a better job at attracting young people and mentoring them.

Philadelphia, in particular, is a city based on relationships, resulting in the tendency to renovate for the same people, whether through capital improvement programs for previous clients or clients bringing us back in when they move to new space. Being a builder gives you the unique ability to experience your accomplishments for decades. I can look at the skyline and know we contributed to the success of the city. For example, we've worked for the Franklin Institute for generations and seeing new generations enjoying and learning through iconic cultural institutions like this one is a constant reminder of the meaningful work we do.

[GBCA](#) (General Building Contractors Association) advances the union commercial, industrial, and institutional construction industry in the Philadelphia region by serving members as the industry leader in labor relations, education, advocacy, safety, and networking opportunities.