

# CEG marks 10th anniversary, partners grow firm into one-stop practice with expertise in civil, structural, mechanical and electrical engineering; from one-room office to custom-built headquarters

By Ken Datzman

Professional Engineers David Alley, Jake Wise, Thomas Adams and Keith Couch have followed their entrepreneurial dreams, which brought them together as a consulting group, one partner at a time over a number of years.

At the Construction Engineering Group in Melbourne, the partners have embraced the same customer-focused vision and practice philosophy. As a result, they have created a desirable "one-stop" venture with in-house expertise in the disciplines of civil, structural, mechanical and electrical engineering.

"This was a golden opportunity for me, because I have always wanted to own my own business, be my own boss, and control my own career destiny," said Couch, who provides the mechanical-engineering component of CEG, a business that is marking its 10th anniversary in the county.

He joined CEG three and half years ago as a principal. Originally from this area, Couch worked in Brevard before moving to West Palm Beach. A graduate of Tennessee Technological University, he holds Leadership in Energy and Design certification through the U.S. Green Building Council.

The partners bring complementing skill sets to the practice. "And, we are all hands-on principals," Couch said. "We are involved with the projects from day one through construction and certificate of occupancy. I think that really helps with the quality."

Electrical engineer Alley spearheaded the business formation of CEG. In 1998, Alley, a solo practitioner at the time operating from a one-room office in Melbourne, envisioned building a full-service, in-house consulting practice centered on the disciplines of electrical, civil, mechanical and structural engineering.

He first reached out to Wise, a civil engineer and Florida State University graduate.

"I think we're unique in the way we have set up the four disciplines of engineering under one roof," said Wise, who has been with the firm for nine years. "It has been a key to the success of the practice. We're able to work off the same computer network and coordinate everything, such as the drawings. A lot of our customers have told us they are thrilled with the one-stop shopping model we've created, especially design-build clients. They can make one phone call and get an update on their projects."

During the past decade, the partners have perfected a blueprint for building and growing a professional-services firm in up-and-down construction markets. Although the real-estate markets, both commercial and residential, have

been shaken by an uncertain economy, CEG continues on a steady growth path, with no company layoffs.

In fact, their business recently added an engineer to its staff. "We are staying busy," said Wise. "The diversification of our projects and the quality of our work has helped us significantly in these uneven times. Clients keep coming back to us."

He adds, "I don't think anybody knows what's going to happen over the next two or three years in this area and in the market. Still, we expect to experience steady growth. We're optimistic. We are getting bigger projects all the time and more work from around the state. It has helped us maneuver through some of the bumpy spots."

A growing piece of CEG's business is coming from the education market, Alley said. "We've completed 35 to 40 school projects in the last year."

CEG is not only working in Brevard on school projects but also around the state, he said. "We've done eight or nine charter schools in Florida. In the last three years, the education market has really taken off for our firm."

Alley said CEG works closely with Imagine Schools in Alexandria, Va. Imagine is one of the nation's fastest-growing operators of public charter schools. It operates 74 charter schools in 13 states.

The church market is another sector that is helping to fuel CEG's growth. "Churches are unique uses and they always have interesting budgets planned for the projects," Wise said. "But sometimes their dreams are bigger than their budgets. We have completed a lot of church projects, so understanding their needs from the beginning really helps. We often work with large committees on church projects."

While commercial development has been pinched by Wall Street woes, Adams says "the core developers" continue to pursue business. "Developers are still moving forward on assisted-living projects and the construction of high-end apartments. We're plugged into them and are working on their projects. This is what they do for a living and they are finding ways to make it work."

CEG will mark its 10th year of business on Oct. 10. The partners have built the consulting practice into a dynamic organization with a diversified roster of clients, serving various commercial sectors, government entities, and the residential market.

The firm has blossomed from one employee to 27 today and is housed in a new, corporate-owned facility. The custom-designed 6,600-square-foot building is part of the Pineapple Ridge development on West Eau Gallie



BBN photo — Adrienne B. Roth

The Construction Engineering Group has served customers for a decade. The one-stop shop consulting firm created by the four partners has grown into a big success. In an uneven economy, CEG is staying busy. From left, the principals are: mechanical engineer Keith Couch, civil engineer Jake Wise, electrical engineer David Alley and structural engineer Thomas Adams.

Boulevard. The building was designed with growth in mind for each of the four departments, Wise said. "We anticipate that to happen over the coming years."

Nationally, activity has been slowing in commercial real-estate sectors in response to tightening credit and sluggish economic growth. Brevard has experienced a slower transaction market for commercial deals, too.

"As we look to the future, there are still a lot of big development projects in the pipeline for Brevard and CEG is positioned to be involved in these projects when the market rebounds," Alley said.

CEG got its start doing small additions and renovations to houses, as well as commercial building renovations. "Today, we're involved with multimillion-dollar projects and are master-planning 300 to 500 acre sites," Wise said.

He adds, "To this day, we still take on the retrofits and the small additions, the piece of business that has given us the platform to grow."

CEG has shown consistent growth year after year. "If you produce a quality product and the owners are happy with it, you're building a foundation for repeat business. And that's what we have done," said Alley, a graduate of Florida State University.

Their firm has forged strategic alliances with architects, general contractors, developers and interior designers in the region.