

Ahead of the Trends

RIPA STAYS TRUE TO ITS STRENGTHS WHILE SHOWING FLEXIBILITY ACROSS MANY SECTORS. BY JIM HARRIS

RIPA and Associates' client base may have changed over its more than 12 years in business, but its dedication to doing quality civil and utility construction work remains the same.

"We're looking at a variety of projects that we probably wouldn't have looked at previously, but our focus and scope remain the same," Vice President Chris LaFace says of the company's focus during the recession.

"We're looking at different opportunities while trying to stay in our areas of expertise," he adds. "We excel at moving dirt, installing utilities and building roads."

Ahead of Trends

Today, RIPA and Associates largely is plying its trade on a number of public sector projects. Much of the company's work from 2003 to 2006 was in the residential sector, with a

shift to commercial projects coming after the housing market started slowing down. Similarly, the company shifted to public work after commercial sector jobs started to become more rare, LaFace says.

"One of our strengths is being able to recognize trends perhaps a little earlier than our competition," he adds. "Seeing these trends and being able to shift our focus has helped a lot."

The last few years have seen a shift from commercial to public projects such as site work and road construction for several schools in the Tampa Bay area, as well as road-widening projects. This year there also has been a return of residential projects such as road construction and utility installation in new subdivisions, albeit on a slightly smaller scale than before.

"We are fortunate enough to be one of the

few remaining companies that can self-perform this type of work in our area and appreciate that recently we've been able to get a share of residential work again," LaFace says. "The difference is that while the residential

RIPA and Associates

www.ripatampa.com

- *Sales: \$50 million*
- *Headquarters: Tampa, Fla.*
- *Employees: 225*
- *Services: Civil and utility contracting*

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-Chris LaFace, vice president



In this economy, most of RIPA's civil and utility construction projects are in the public sector.

projects were maybe 300 to 400 lots at a time before the recession, they're closer to 50 to 100 lots now."

LaFace credits the increase in residential projects in part to the federal tax credit for first-time homebuyers, which spurred an increased demand on developers for quality homes in good locations. Developers in the Tampa Bay area also are now working to either complete previously unfinished projects or on new phases of existing developments.

RIPA and Associates has shown it is flexible about the variety of types of projects it takes on while remaining true to its roots and strengths in civil and utility work.

"What we try to do is remain flexible to different opportunities, but not get outside of our area of expertise," LaFace says.

Quality Work

RIPA and Associates stresses quality and customer satisfaction when working with clients



and other contractors.

"We try to treat other contractors the same way whether we're working as a subcontractor or as the general contractor,"

LaFace says. "Our No. 1 focus is on customer satisfaction. Having other contractors recognize you're a team player, and being a team player, makes everyone's job better.

"The easier you can make it on a general contractor as a subcontractor, the better your chances are they'll bring you back on their next job," he adds.

This emphasis on quality shapes the culture of the company, which helps RIPA and Associates stand out amongst its competition. "We have a team approach and stress to all employees to do the best quality job they can and not take shortcuts," LaFace says. "We have a mindset that we want to do the right thing and want our customers to be happy.

The company also strongly emphasizes meeting safety standards, and has a safety director who regularly conducts audits on proj-

ect crews. "We are constantly reinforcing safety to our crews," LaFace says. "If we find someone not doing something correctly, we take the approach of how can we learn from it and do it better the next time". Our type of work takes a lot of planning to do correctly and send everyone home safe at the end of the day."


A Family Feel

Frank Ripa, a professional engineer with multiple licenses and extensive civil engineering and construction experience, founded the company in 1998. Ripa previously co-owned Florida Land Design and Engineering Inc., which he sold in 1989.


The company started small, relying on municipal work from contacts Ripa made while with Florida Land Design, before growing to \$92 million in revenue in 2006, the firm's biggest year, LaFace says.

RIPA and Associates remains a family owned company with a corporate culture that reflects its roots. "We've tried hard to keep the feel that everyone here is family," he adds. "Keeping an open door policy, keeping in touch with everybody and getting out and seeing everyone is very important to us." ♦

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