

PROFILE IN CONSTRUCTION & DESIGN

RCGA Architects-Interior Designers: On an upward path

It began with a boyhood passion for the skies. As Robert St. C. Gaskin, the Jamaican-born principal of RCGA Architects-Interior Designers, grew up near Edinburgh Airport in Scotland, he became fascinated with aviation. With a pilot's license earned at age 21 and an architecture degree from Pratt Institute gained a few years later, he was hired by Skidmore Owings and Merrill (SOM) and immediately assigned projects at such major airports as Dulles and Spartanburg, NC. Gaskin understood that "what people see on the outside represents only a fifth of an airport's function," and he was determined to apply his knowledge to the other four-fifths of the operations.

Work at SOM was followed by several years at a smaller company until Gaskin founded his own firm in 1997: RCGA, a certified MBE. No sooner had he managed to carve a niche in one of the most competitive corners of the market, aviation systems design (terminals and hangars in particular), than he was finding work for retail chains, affordable housing and houses of worship. "Everything just followed, and flowed, naturally," says Gaskin. He points out that a stunning 100% of the projects at RCGA have come from referrals and recommendations. "We're 12 years old and have only started to look into marketing a

year ago," he says.

RCGA Architects, with headquarters in Jamaica, Queens, has performed projects for the AirTrain at the American Airlines and British Airways Terminals at John F. Kennedy International Airport and at the Delta Airlines Terminal at LaGuardia Airport. He notes that three-quarters of the RCGA Architects team of 23 have airport expertise which includes thorough knowledge of the requirements and procedures set forth by the Port Authority of NY & NJ.

"It is essential to know the Port Authority's standards, procedures, and protocol. We fully understand the expectations. Also, on airport projects there's always a 'critical path' - opening dates that must be met and budgets that cannot be exceeded. We have always adhered strictly to these milestones. That's what has allowed us to gain a reputation in this area and to attract other clients seeking this degree of quality and reliability," he says.

In fact, the firm's success in aviation has allowed it to take off (pun intended) in other areas as well: RCGA Architects now has several clients among the many retail chains that operate in airports including EJE Retail Inc, (particularly in Raleigh

Durham); Paradies Retail, a franchiser that operates Brooks Brothers, the New York Times stores (among others); and Dunkin' Donuts.

The Downtown Jamaica Improvement Project recently hired RCGA Architects as part of the team for Phase 1 of its work, streetscaping and the installation of several new retail stores at the LIRR Jamaica Station.

RCGA has gained the attention of the religious community as well. The firm has recently completed the design for the rehabilitation of the 1925 Vanderbilt Theater in Jamaica for the All Nations Evangelism Church, which includes the rehabilitation of the existing 2,500 seat theater, with new pulpit and choir loft, interior stained glass windows and the introduction of state of the art audio visual and light equipment. RCGA also completed the restoration of the 1876 Huguenot Memorial Church in Pelham Manor, New York.

The firm has been working as prime design architect for developer OMNI New York LLC, a company founded and run by former baseball great 'Mo' Vaughn. RCGA has completed the rehabilitation of over 6,400 apartment units

for low and middle income residents in New York City and throughout New York State through OMNI including Baisley Apartments in Queens; Thesalonica in the Bronx; The Noble Drew Plaza in Brooklyn; Whitney Young in Yonkers; Admiral Halsey in Poughkeepsie; and The Courtyard Garden in Hempstead.

Part of RCGA's success with residential work comes from its great sensitivity to the community.

"We always meet with the tenants and explain what we will do, how it will benefit them, and how the renovations will be phased in to minimize any disruption," he says.

Understanding the interaction of people and their dynamics is something that Gaskin extends to his staff of 20 employees and two partners. "We have always remained a close-knit family. It's a feeling we've cultivated over the years." The staff's devotion has helped RCGA maintain its commitment to completing projects on time and within budget, and is now responsible for its ability to survive the recession and do surprisingly well despite the economy. "We've hired one new project manager and two architects over the past year," he says.

The skies remain sunny and filled with promise for RCGA.



Russo acquires 190k s/f warehouse

Russo Development LLC a full service, private developer and owner of commercial and residential real estate, announces their acquisition of a vacant 190,000 square foot warehouse in Kearny which is planned for a new mixed-use redevelopment.

The 7.5-acre site is located in the heart of Kearny at the intersection of Schuyler and Bergen avenues and is in close proximity to New York City, Newark, and Harrison. Last month, the existing industrial facility was demolished to make way for Schuyler Crossing, a new development of 232 multi-family apartments and 20,000 square feet of retail space. Site improvements are currently underway and vertical construction of the proposed buildings is scheduled to begin in mid-2009.

"The property's location and mixed-use redevelopment potential made it a natural fit for our company," says Omer Ahmed, vice president of acquisitions for Russo Development. "We are aggressively acquiring redevelopment opportunities throughout northern New Jersey for a variety of

uses." President and Chief Operating Officer Edward Russo, adds "We are excited to begin another redevelopment project within the Town of Kearny." Russo recently completed Saw Mill Park, a 400,000 square foot industrial redevelopment project in Town, which is fully leased to the Pepsi Bottling Group and HD Smith Wholesale Drug Company.

Russo Development is one of the most active developers in New Jersey. It is a leading designer, builder, and owner of Class A industrial, data center and residential properties that has developed over sixty (60) first-class projects since 1969. The company has earned a reputation for well-planned, highly functional developments that are distinguished by its emphasis on quality and detail, outstanding property management and tenant relations services as well as competitive pricing. Russo Development utilizes a highly successful development program to consistently meet market demand and is aggressively acquiring new value-added, redevelopment facilities and developable land throughout the region.

Eco Earth part of Accelerator project

Eco Earth Design is the latest company to be accepted by the New Jersey Meadowlands Commission to become a client of the NJMC Business Accelerator. The new company will focus on landscape design and build processes committed to resource conservation, intelligent irrigation and bio-diversity.

Eco Earth Design is a spin-off of R&S Landscaping, a leading regional design,

build and maintenance firm serving Bergen, Morris and Passaic counties for over 24 years.

The NJMC Business Accelerator, a project of the New Jersey Meadowlands Commission, provides early stage businesses the support services, guidance and networking opportunities that are critical to turning an idea or technology into a successful business.

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