

40 years

R&W

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R&W ENGINEERING

PUTTING FAMILY AND CLIENTS FIRST
FOR 40 YEARS

As it celebrates its 40th year in business, R&W Engineering is in an enviable position. In addition to a headquarters in Beaverton, the firm has a satellite office in Vancouver, Washington. Its portfolio contains multiple projects for more than 1,500 clients. Employees give the firm high marks for professional freedom and a flexible, family friendly culture.

The list of accomplishments is especially impressive when one considers that the firm got its start at a kitchen table in the home of one of its founders, Harry Reeder.

Reeder and Mark Wirfs, the other founding partner of the firm, first met when they were both engineers working for the firm that was then called CH2M Hill. A couple of years after both had left the firm, they happened to run into each other in an elevator. At the time, Reeder was interviewing for a job in Houston.

"A friend said, 'Don't move to Houston; you'll hate it. Start your own business instead,'" Reeder recalled.

That advice was still ringing in Reeder's ears a short time later when he again encountered Wirfs. Reeder invited his co-worker to his house. By the time an informal meeting at Reeder's kitchen table was done, the two men had decided they would start their own firm.

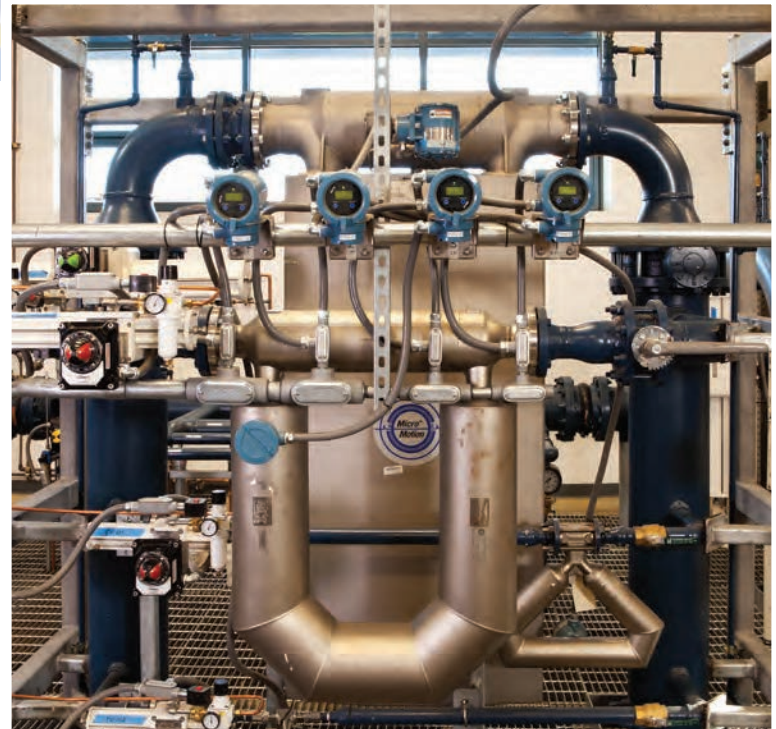
"We didn't think it would last four months," Reeder said with a chuckle.

Still the new partners were determined to give their business venture their best shot. They started by looking at their potential competition. Plenty of firms were focused on mechanical engineering. Far fewer were the firms specializing in electrical and control system engineering, so that's where Wirfs and Reeder decided to focus their attention.

The partners went on to find what Wirfs calls "a couple of good, early clients." Included in that group were companies like Tektronix



R&W Presidents (left to right): Harry Reeder (past), Gregg Scholz (current), and Mark Wirfs (past).



Portland Water Bureau, Large Meter Test Bench: Electrical, Mechanical & Automation design.

and government agencies like the U.S. Forest Service and Bonneville Power Administration.

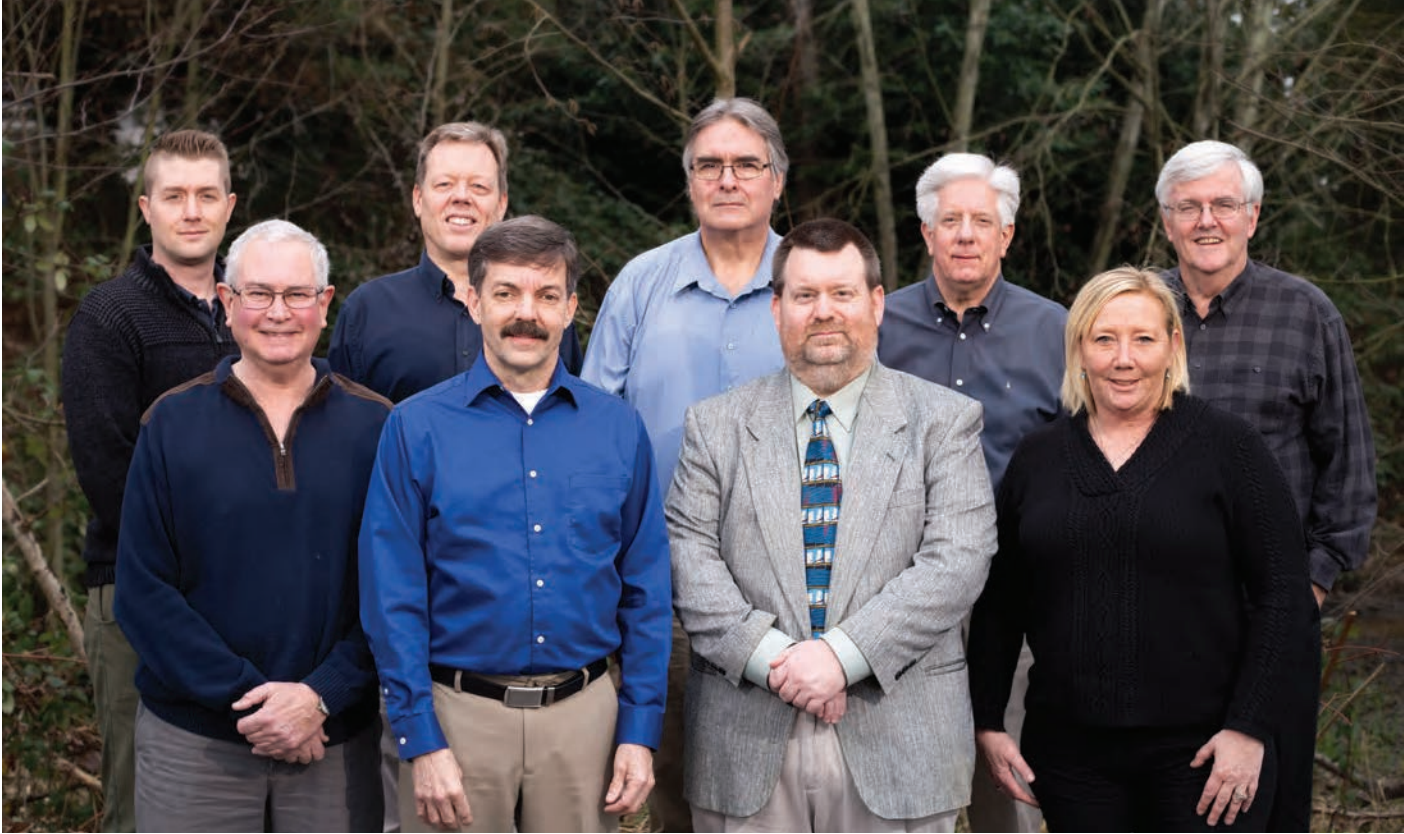
Four decades later, the firm is still doing business with many of those early clients. Not too long ago, for example, R&W wrapped up work on electrical arc flash labeling for all of BPA's support facilities in the Pacific Northwest.

But even as the firm has developed deep expertise in the work that helped it get established, it also has moved into new areas, taking on municipal water and wastewater projects, expanding into mechanical projects and developing expertise in telecom.

R&W's expertise in commercial work gained ground in 1998, when the firm added nine people from the local office of The Bentley Company. A mechanical and electrical company with 400 employees – including nine in a local office – that was owned by Enron, Bentley had been slowly phasing out its engineering work. Bentley gave people in its local office a choice: find another firm to buy the office or close and find new jobs. Those in the office approached R&W Engineering.

"That was the day we went from 26 to 35 people," Wirfs said. "We added nine people overnight."

Among those people was Ed Carlisle, the company's current vice



Current ownership (left to right): Sam Russum, Don Pfaff, Mark Jones, Gregg Scholz, Ed Carlisle, Jeff Howard, Doug Shaw, Heather Harris, Greg Robertson.

president and one of the leaders helping shape R&W as it moves toward its future.

These days, R&W's project list usually boasts a mix of about 30 percent municipal projects and 35 to 40 percent commercial and institutional, with the remainder a mix of projects that run to the unique and unusual, such as specialty piping design for high-tech industries. The company's leaders believe that staying flexible is the key to future success.

"Our focus changes as the needs of the industry – and the economy – change," said Gregg Scholz, who joined R&W in 1980 and took over as president in 2011.

The company also has shifted with the times in other areas. The culture has always operated with the philosophy of "do a good job and enjoy your work" that Wirfs and Reeder carried with them from their days at CH2M Hill. But in recent years, R&W has also increased its focus on providing flexibility and creating a family friendly environment.

Even as the firm taps a pool of talented young millennials, R&W's leaders encourage those with experience to stick around as long as they like. Reeder, for example, stepped away from a full-time position with the firm a decade ago, but he leases a desk in the office and often involves R&W employees with many of the consulting projects he takes on. Several other senior members of the staff still

actively work on projects, with no intention of slowing down anytime soon.

"We have a longer tenure than most firms," Scholz said. "We take a lot of pride in that."

"We give employees a lot of freedom in how they do their jobs," Carlisle added. "That makes them want to stay."

Another aspect that keeps employees sticking around is the fact the office is a place where family members, including the four-legged variety, are welcome. A Kids Cube area, for example, offers a play area complete with coloring books and crayons for staff children and grandchildren.

"Not a day goes by that you don't see kids and dogs in the office," Scholz said.

Although Reeder and Wirfs are still around and Carlisle and Scholz are settled into their leadership roles, there's already a move to establish the firm's next generation of leaders."

While Reeder and Wirfs planted the seeds of that culture, it's something that has also grown and flourished over the past 40 years. Ensuring that continues is something the firm's current leaders view as equal parts responsibility and privilege.

"It's a fluid process," Scholz said. "We work hard to keep the company culture and client focus that Harry and Mark started years ago."



R&W's first drafting table, 1978.

