

Bob Brosamer – 2007 Golden Beavers Management Award

The son of a construction superintendent, Bob started his construction career as a laborer at the age of 16 and continued this work to pay for his civil engineering studies at the University of California. He looks back at his years as a laborer as an invaluable experience that gave him respect for the people “who sweat for a living.”

In 1964 24-year-old Bob joined Gordon H. Ball Company and was named a project engineer on the Vacaville Highway project. Bob spent the winter following the project at the company’s equipment yard, where his natural mechanical ability was noticed.

The following year he was named design engineer for modifications to canal trimming and lining equipment and then promoted to superintendent for trimming and lining of a 75-mile section of the California Aqueduct in the southern San Joaquin Valley. This work involved four contiguous contracts being built by a joint venture of Gordon H. Ball Co. and Granite Construction Co. The equipment improvements contributed significantly to the profitability of the job and provided a preview of Bob’s ingenuity that would become a trademark of his career and the companies he would form.

His reward for the success on the canal work was to be named project manager for Gordon Ball Co.’s I-5 Front Street project in Sacramento in 1968. This was the company’s largest project to date, involving 1.5 miles of new freeway with finish grade below the elevation of the adjacent Sacramento River. Despite risks of flooding and the need for an extensive dewatering system, the project was completed over a year early.

At the end of 1971, Bob left the company, which had been acquired by Dillingham four years earlier, and formed Ball, Ball & Brosamer, Inc. with Gordon Ball’s sons, Dennis and Nate. The new company focused on large water transmission projects in California, Arizona and New Mexico. The company’s equipment innovations and techniques enabled it to capture 80-90% of

the canal work during the 1970s and 80s. One key development was the “Spoiler,” a 250-ft.-long traveling conveyor belt that placed excavated material directly into embankment areas, replacing nine conventional pieces of equipment and significantly reduced earthwork costs. Ball, Ball & Brosamer eventually constructed 290 miles of the Central Arizona Project for the Bureau of Reclamation under 22 contracts totaling nearly \$400 million. During the peak years they handled up to 20 million cubic yards of earthmoving.

As the canal work slowed, Bob successfully guided the company into highway and airport work in the western states, earning numerous awards. Among these awards were two of the top national honors from the American Concrete Pavement Association in 1990 for their work on Interstate 15 in Utah and the widening of Superstition Freeway in Arizona.

When Nate Ball wanted to sell his share of the company in 1987, Nate and Bob sold a majority interest in the company to a Joannau and Paraskeveides (J & P), a European construction company. At its peak, Ball, Ball & Brosamer’s annual volume reached \$250 million. Bob continued with the company until 1992, when he sold his remaining interest to J & P.

During the next two years Bob tried retirement and found it was not for him. He missed the excitement of tackling projects, the energy from working with other enthusiastic construction people and the sense of accomplishment of building major structures. Together with his wife Linda, he started R & L Brosamer, Inc. in 1994 and targeted seismic retrofit work in Northern California. As California’s seismic retrofit program increased, the company grew with it. Soon the company had branched out to highway projects of \$10 million and larger, including some demanding fast-track projects for Caltrans to complete the final improvements on two heavily traveled interchanges in Walnut Creek, CA (I-680/Hwy. 24) and Emeryville, CA (I-80/I-880). Because of the importance of finishing these projects in a timely manner, there were daily incentives/disincentives/ liquidated damages of \$10,000 and \$20,000, respectively. Both were completed on schedule, despite poor weather conditions for which there were no extensions.

Bob has also targeted canal work during the past five years, handling three lining projects in the California Central Valley, one in New Mexico, and the company is currently constructing the \$70 million Coachella Canal in California's Imperial Valley.

The work the company has landed in the San Jose, CA area demonstrates their versatility. R & L Brosamer has completed four light rail light rail project totaling over \$110 million, a \$31 million flood control project, and has built both runways at Norman E. Mineta International Airport in San Jose. One of these projects, the \$42 million Tasman West Light Rail was awarded the American Public Works Association's 2000 Public Works Project of the Year.

From its start in 1994, Bob guided R & L Brosamer to \$15 million in volume during their first full year in business and has grown it to over \$160 million last year. The organization he has created encourages "out of the box" thinking to find new and innovative approaches to building projects and solving problems. Bob is known as a great workforce motivator and loyal employer, in fact many employees go back to his time at Ball, Ball & Brosamer, and there are some second-generation and a few third-generation employees.

His wife Linda, who Bob describes as the "soul of the company," handles the administrative end of the business, allowing Bob and their other partners to focus on getting work and building it profitably.

Bob credits Gordon Ball (Golden Beaver – Management 1978) and Vince Smith with mentoring him during the early years of his career. He recalls some of Gordon's sage advice – "The secret to making money in construction is staying in business." Bob has experienced this and notes that when tough times thin out the competition, the recovery period can be very profitable. He adds that Gordon Ball saw potential in him that he did not see in himself and provided him with the great opportunities to develop this potential. He enjoys working with his current team in this same role, developing their talents and challenging them to achieve far beyond their expectations.