

"[T]his country's infrastructure is old, dated – needs to be updated and renovated. And ... there's a lot of new infrastructure going in as well." — Gary Dahms of T&M

Dispatch from Middletown

Gary Dahms leads T&M Associates toward a milestone anniversary – and beyond

BY MATTHEW FAZELPOOR

T&M Associates continues to write its New Jersey business story as it nears a milestone anniversary next year. The national consulting, engineering, environmental services company is headquartered in Middletown. Since its founding in 1966, the organization has served public and private clients across the country. Gary Dahms serves as chairman and CEO, a role he has held since 2012.

NJBIZ recently spoke with Dahms to discuss the company's local heritage; how it continues to grow and evolve; core principles; its upcoming 60th anniversary; and his own, upcoming milestone.

Dahms was born and raised in the Garden State and by way of his uncle – who was the Monmouth County engineer – he pursued that field, getting an engineering degree at Lafayette College.

"Not my first job, but my second job – I joined T&M Associates," he told NJBIZ. "I grew up in southern Monmouth County and T&M was in Monmouth County. And when I settled down with my wife and to raise a family, I wanted to be in Monmouth County. I joined T&M in 1986. So next year, that will be 40 years – long time."

He started as a staff engineer and worked his way up to his current role leading the company. "It's been a great journey – a great journey personally and a great journey with the company."

As he reflected on that odyssey to where T&M is today, which he described as "very, very rewarding," Dahms shared his thoughts about the firm and his leadership.

"The culture at T&M is probably the thing I'm most proud of," he stressed. "We've got a phenomenal culture at T&M. It makes going to work every day both rewarding, satisfying – and fun."

Dahms also pointed to next year's 60th anniversary.

"Not common in our industry. It's not common – one, that companies stay around that long; and two, companies that remain what we call a legacy company," he explained. "We are owned by more than a handful of employees. We have no interest in being bought – and no interest in being bought out by private equity. So, it's a legacy company that's going to remain a legacy company."

He also described what's been happening over the past couple of years.

"2024 was the fourth year in our current strategic plan. In those four consecutive years, we continue to meet our goals in terms of growth and profitability," Dahms



said. "This is the last year in that five-year plan. So, we will be looking at, during the course of this year, creating the new Vision 2030 for T&M."

He said that in 2025, so far, T&M remains on target for its goals: continued growth and profitability.

"I like to talk about the engineering, as a whole, as a very resilient, predictable industry," Dahms explained. "Most of our work falls under five markets – water, environmental, transportation, community and land development, and buildings and facilities. In all those markets, the primary driver is infrastructure."

"It's well-documented that this country's infrastructure is old, dated – needs to be updated and renovated. And the country continues to grow, so there's a lot of new infrastructure going in as well," he said. "So, it's a very stable, predictable industry – good industry to be in. At the end of the day, when we finish our projects, we can look back and say, 'Wow, we made a difference in our communities. We've improved the quality of life of our people, our communities, our clients.'"

WHAT'S HOT

The discussion turned next to notable projects that T&M is, has and will work on.

"We are national firm – we work on a lot of big projects throughout the country and in the state. One of the bigger projects



Dahms

we're working on right now is with Middlesex County," said Dahms, lauding the county for investing in its communities. "On the [Middlesex County] college campus – a ball field, multiuse purpose building, a magnet school."

Dahms said other areas in which the firm is working include transportation as well as water and the environmental space – especially PFAS, where he noted a lot of energy and momentum.

"This past year, and even looking forward, the water and environmental, and transportation, are going to be the hot markets," said Dahms. "And again, back to the infrastructure dollars. There's the Gateway tunnel. We are not directly involved with the Gateway tunnel – but on the periphery, there are so many ripple effects, adjacent projects that are happening with Gateway that are not directly, but they're a result of Gateway."

"And that's what we are involved with. That spurs the economy. It's jobs. That's money flowing in the state – and that's what you want. All of the engineers and the contractors that are working on that have mortgages; have bills to pay; have families to feed. Again, the engineering industry is a great economic engine – both in this

state and across the country."

The conversation shifted to the rapidly changing dynamics politically at the federal level – and what looms on the state level, with a gubernatorial election in November that will result in a new leader to succeed term-limited Gov. Phil Murphy. Dahms discussed how he navigates those realities leading a firm such as T&M.

He said the company does risk assessments and prepares to deal with different scenarios – and then is nimble to adjust. He pointed to how the company responded to things like Superstorm Sandy and the pandemic.

"Different administrations come in with different priorities, different philosophies, policies," said Dahms, noting that to date there had been no measurable impact that he has seen from federal policy changes. "Although we have a plan for it."

"I would say there's a little more cautiousness on the private side," Dahms continued. "T&M is about 65% public contracts/public clients – and about 35% private. So, we see a little bit of cautiousness, maybe, on the private side until things settle down, and there's a little more predictability. I would say the same on the government – but not as much – because those contracts and that money, at least to date, has been untouched."

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The conversation shifted back to next year’s anniversary and whether the company was planning anything special – with the milestone also coinciding with the country’s 250th birthday and the 2026 FIFA World Cup coming to New Jersey next year.

“Nothing finalized. We are certainly going to have something to celebrate the 60th anniversary,” said Dahms. He shared how T&M marked its 50th – with an employee-led committee that launched a theme of 50 Ways of Giving. Then, once a week, the company would commit to doing something to give back to the communities. “Which was a phenomenal idea – so phenomenal, in fact, I think we ended up doing 90 events that year.

“It was so embraced by our employees, the leadership at T&M, and our clients – that that planted the seed. And a couple of years later, we created the T&M Associates Foundation, which really created a strategic and deliberate way to give back to our community – from a give-back charitable perspective,” Dahms continued. “I’m hoping something like that comes out of the 60th. But whatever it is, it’s going to be a great celebration – 60 years. And I get to celebrate my 40th anniversary at the same time, which is also nice.

“It should be a good year.”

Asked about the firm’s philanthropic activities, Dahm cited education and volunteering.

“There are four main pillars in the foundation: STEM education, which is probably one of, if not the most important – because we are an engineering company. We rely on, depend on, need STEM-educated students to continue to grow and do our business,” he explained.

Dahm highlighted STEM scholarships that T&M has given out over the years, including a tranche during the 50th anniversary.

“The other part, I think, is very big in our company and the foundation is volunteerism – whether it’s Habitat for Humanity, clean the beaches, soup kitchens,” said Dahms. Other pillars include fundraising and charitable giving.

Dahms also discussed how he helps create the culture he mentioned earlier.

“I’m a firm believer that culture comes from the leadership, comes from the top. And if you don’t have a firm belief in a good culture at the top – from me, down to the senior leadership team to the executive team – and live it, not just talk about it, but live it: you’re not going to have it,” said Dahms. “Some of it comes out of that T&M Associates Foundation. The success it had internally on the employees doing 90 events instead of 50 showed how engaged we are with each other and with our communities.

“And just continuing to foster that, whether it’s visiting each office a couple times of year, personally; being connected to the employees – being real with the employees is so important.”

He said he was very proud to have been awarded several years running as a Best Places to Work in each of T&M’s major regions, which Dahms says speaks to the culture.

“But not only that – what we get out of those surveys in terms of feedback from our employees. We continue to build off that. Where we’re not hitting home runs, that’s where we need to focus. And we use that survey data to continue to improve. And I think that’s evident in our culture.”

GOOD FOR BUSINESS

In 2023, Dahms was elected chairman of the New Jersey Chamber of Commerce board of directors. He talked about the organization’s place in the state’s policy firmament.

“It’s been an honor,” said Dahms. “I’ve been involved with the Chamber for a very, very long time. And I first got involved because I think it’s the strongest advocate for business in the state. It’s always striking a balance between working with the legislators and a government who can control a lot of our business and advocating for the business community.

“I think Tom [Bracken, president and

CEO] and Mike [Egerton, executive vice president, Government Relations] do a phenomenal job in that,” he continued. “I’m a firm believer that the Chamber has been good for business and continues to be good – no matter who the administration is in Trenton. And we see the results.”

He lauded the Chamber’s leadership and its staff – adding that the entire experience has been a pleasure.

“It’s great to be able to have a voice there – and be able to express some of the engineering concerns,” said Dahms. “As a whole, the Chamber’s done a great job.”

As the conversation was winding down, Dahms spoke about the experience of leading T&M over the last decade-plus. “I’m the fourth-generation president. When I became president, T&M was probably 90% New Jersey. We had one office in Pennsylvania. Why I’m still at T&M is, again, because I love the people there. I think it’s a phenomenal place. The opportunity it gave me to grow my career – I wanted to have that opportunity provided to a lot more people.

“So, seeing the company now be in eight or nine states – we’re across the country, but we still have that same culture,” he stressed. “And when I look back on my career, being able to grow and provide a lot of opportunity for a lot more people – but still have that same culture – that’s the most rewarding thing for me.”

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