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FEATURE:
GATES: 25 Years of Caring
LET'S DO LUNCH & DINNER:
Gather



GATES: 25 Years of Caring

By Elizabeth W. Pearce

When he began his career as a Naples-based general contractor, Todd Gates may have started out small, but his vision was not. His proactive approach and the help of his team members and partners transformed a single-office operation into GATES, one of the largest firms of its kind based in Southwest Florida. In addition to general contracting, the company provides construction management and design-build services.

Gates, chairman of his namesake firm, says the key to success has as much to do with building relationships as it does building structures. "Someone told me a long time ago that being successful in life and in business comes down to one word, 'care.' From day one, our culture has been to care about our product, our reputation and our credibility, as well as everybody we come in contact with," he says. One of the relationships for which he is grateful is his longstanding partnership with the Butz family out of Allentown, Pennsylvania. "Without their loyal support and friendship we would not be where we are today."

Now celebrating 25 years of achieving its goals, GATES's culture of caring has never wavered, even as the brand has blossomed and diversified. "We truly put our heart into everything that we do," says John Hayes, company president and CEO. "That gives the best results and also lets everyone know that we're in it together."

GATES specializes in market sectors including commercial, healthcare, residential (mainly multi-family and condominiums), industrial, hospitality, educational, government, religious, clubhouse and special projects, such as interior tenant improvements and renovation work.

The company is also geographically diverse. In addition to operating throughout Florida, North Carolina and the Gulf coast, GATES builds projects for national clients throughout the southeastern U.S. The company also maintains a presence in Latin America through relationships based in the Republic of Panama. Last February, it



▲ Golisano Children's Hospital of Southwest Florida in Fort Myers.

opened its newest full-service office in Sarasota to support the booming northern portion of its Southwest Florida service area. In December, the company broke ground there on a boutique luxury downtown condominium, along with other retail and hospitality projects.

DIVERSITY, PHILANTHROPY FUEL SUCCESS

Gates concedes the firm's rise to prominence in the marketplace "didn't happen overnight" and wasn't always a smooth journey. But even in the most trying market cycles, he and his team continued moving forward as he tried to predict where the market was headed. "It's critically important to look ahead as far as possible and make something happen as opposed to waiting for something to happen. That's part of our corporate culture," he adds. "Wherever we think the market is going to go, we try to be there when it arrives."

Gates and his leadership team have exhibited uncanny foresight. Their ability to accurately read the market has enabled GATES to diversify and expand while many of its competi-

tors struggled. "Being diversified has meant being flexible," says Hayes. For example, when private sector projects evaporated during the recession, GATES kept busy with public works projects and assignments from repeat clients that remained active.

Being geographically diversified also helped. "With our area being hit so hard (by the economic downturn), having a statewide presence allowed us to find projects in other Florida markets that weren't as economically challenged," says Hayes. Construction projects in Panama and Latin America also buoyed GATES's book of business.

Community involvement has been another significant factor in the company's success. "We aren't just a general contractor and we're not order takers," says Gates. "Our company extends well beyond our four walls and our front door."

He notes that everyone in the company is involved in "something that seeks to improve the local quality of life," be it a church, an educational foundation, a chamber of commerce or any number of not-for-profit organizations focused on children, veterans

or other special-needs groups. GATES employees also work collectively on charitable projects throughout the year, such as making blankets for pediatric patients at a local clinic. No one is required to participate. “John and I are big believers that you lead by example, not by policies,” says Gates.

The company’s kindness also extends on a personal level to its employees, who are referred to as “associates” or “team members.” For example, immediately after Hurricane Irma, Gates and Hayes contacted everyone in the company, inviting them to come to their homes if they needed a shower, a meal or a place to stay. Then, when the office reopened for business, workers who’d lost power at home were encouraged to bring their children and pets to work with them until their electricity was restored and schools were open.

Just don’t expect Gates to discuss his good deeds or charitable endeavors. Although he and his wife, Angela, are well known for their philanthropic leadership, he’s reluctant to reveal specific beneficiaries. In some ways, GATES is one of them.

“Being part of the community, locally and statewide, offers us a tremendous number of relationships and opportunities that we might not have if we were simply order takers,” says Gates. “That’s not why we do it, but that’s really how we’ve been successful going forward.”



▲ *The Naples Daily News print facility.*

A RESPECTED REPUTATION

In the process of delivering millions of square feet of space for commercial clients, GATES has built a loyal following, becoming the go-to contractor for market sectors including clubhouse and religious projects. For example, over the years the company has completed multiple projects at Vanderbilt Presbyterian Church in Naples, the latest of which entailed a major renovation and expansion. “It was a unique job,” says Realtor Rick Miles, who represents the church on construction projects.

He says that what started with the purchase of a custom, multi-million dollar pipe organ ended up requiring

“a complete re-do” of the sanctuary in order to accommodate it. Despite two years of planning, there were some surprises once construction began.

“During demolition, we discovered we had a double floor, which resulted in more work than we anticipated,” says Miles. “We also found out we needed to upgrade our mechanical and electrical systems, and address some water issues that surfaced during construction. But GATES immediately resolved the problems.”

Miles says the new and improved facility is “spectacular” and has been well received, and commends GATES’s project manager and superintendent for being conscientious, professional and communicative. “They were on the job site every day and did a number of things that saved us a lot of money. I would highly recommend them.”

General Manager Bill Bower expressed similar sentiments after working with GATES on a multi-faceted renovation/construction project at Heritage Palms Golf and Country Club in Fort Myers. “There was a great commitment to the project at all levels of the organization,” says Bower, noting how impressed he was to see Hayes at his weekly meetings with the project manager and superintendent. “It was assuring to know that the top of the chain was paying attention to the project.”

The project involved building a two-story, 14,000sf fitness center and a new tennis rest/storage shelter. The work also entailed renovating the clubhouse ballroom, bar, kitchen, pro shop, lobby and



▲ *An aerial view of Quail West Golf & Country Club in Naples.*

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offices, and adding covered and outdoor dining areas to the expanded Grille Room.

In some cases, the GATES team identified structural issues before they became problems. “The superintendent found some things in the field that looked fine on paper, but would have cost us time if the architect and engineer hadn’t made some adjustments,” says Bower. “In each case, he was right. From our perspective (working with GATES) was a very positive experience.”

ONE-OF-A-KIND PROJECTS

As with his philanthropy, Gates resists choosing favorites from the company’s award-winning project portfolio. “But I will tell you the projects that are especially meaningful to me — as an individual and a company — are the ones you only get to build once in a lifetime,” he says. “It’s very satisfying to work on projects that help change people’s lives (because) they’re lasting.” Among them:

- **The Freedom Memorial** in Naples, which pays homage to the 9/11 first responders and war veterans.
- **Naples Daily News**, one of the last U.S. print facilities to be built from the ground up.
- **Lee County Emergency Operations Center**, which served as the command center and backdrop for all televised press conferences during Hurricane Irma. “To see that structure be an asset to the community during a very difficult time meant a lot to me,” says Gates.
- **Numerous public schools** throughout Florida, with projects ranging from less than \$2 million to more than \$50 million.
- **Golisano Children’s Hospital of Southwest Florida** (a Skanska GATES joint venture) is a project that Gates describes as “very special.”
- **Interpretive Center at Six Mile Cypress Slough Preserve**, the first commercial LEED Certified (Silver) project in Lee County.
- **The Naples Zoo**, where GATES has completed multiple projects.

- **The Ritz Carlton—Naples** multi-phase renovations. “It’s rare to get to work in an operational Ritz-Carlton, which makes it memorable.”

FOCUS ON SOUTHWEST FLORIDA

Currently, most of GATES’s work is in Southwest Florida, where the company has several major projects in various stages of completion.

- **Gulf Coast Medical Center.** In a joint venture with Skanska, GATES just broke ground on a \$347.6 million expansion and renovation of the medical center in Fort Myers. The project includes renovating 46,000sf and adding 367,500 to the existing 531,000sf medical center. When completed by 2021, the multi-phase project will include the addition of 268 inpatient beds to the hospital and the relocation of Lee Memorial Hospital’s trauma center, as well as a new dialysis center and cardiology unit. The radiology department, emergency room and pharmacy also will be expanded.
- **CubeSmart Self Storage.** The two-story, 131,234sf building contains approximately 1,000 climate-controlled storage units and is one of the largest storage facilities in Naples. Since completing the project last fall, GATES has broken ground on a self-storage facility in east Naples for another developer.
- **All Seasons.** Just completed in Naples, the 290,000sf project features independent living, assisted living and memory care, with 189 one- and two-bedroom apartments in multi-story buildings with courtyards and balconies. Amenities include a restaurant-style kitchen and



▲ *The Atrium condominium in Aventura.*

private dining room, bistro bar, library, salon, fitness center, physical therapy and memory care center. GATES has additional senior living facilities underway in both Ft. Myers and Naples.

- **Quail West Golf & Country Club.** GATES has made a name for itself as the leading club builder in Southwest Florida. The two-phase Quail West project involves 12,676sf of new construction and the addition/renovation of 74,991sf. The first phase was completed last spring and includes a new two-story, 12,000sf fitness and wellness center and a total remodel of the upper-floor kitchen, dining room, gathering room and lobby. The second phase, slated for completion in the first quarter, includes a new two-story covered terrace and grill room and significant upgrades to the existing dining areas on both floors. The existing lower-level kitchen was demolished and has been completely renovated. Clubhouse additions include a two-story storage building, an expanded pro shop and café, and new tennis courts.

Gates says that he and Hayes expect the company to remain busy for the foreseeable future. “We have a lot of exciting projects coming up, including hospitality, healthcare, condominium and club projects. 2018 looks very promising; we are truly blessed. It could be the best year we’ve ever had.” 📌