

mlb construction

Passing The Torch

WRITTEN BY MIKE PIEKARSKI | PHOTOS PROVIDED

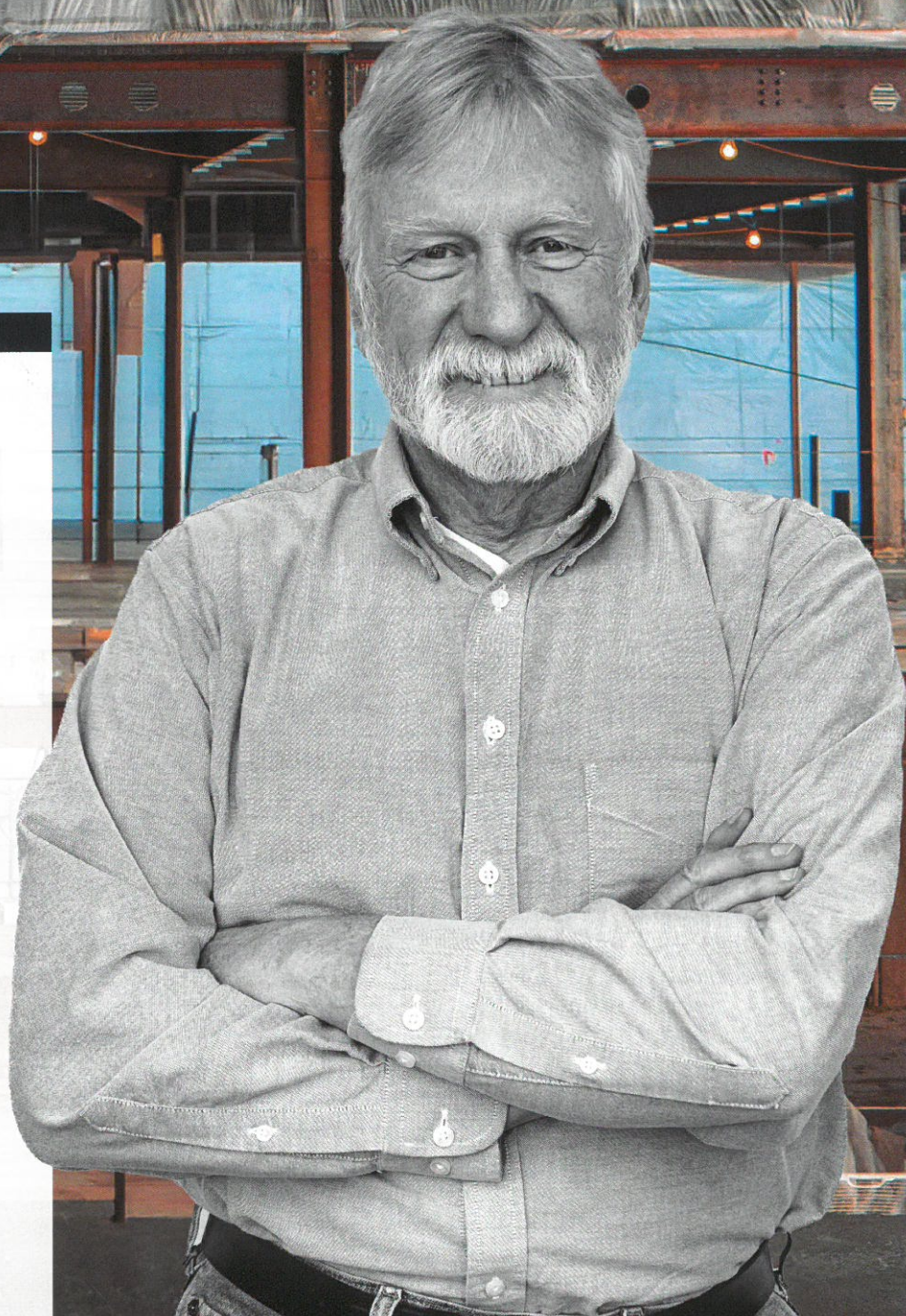
T

ransitions are not always easy. Whether in life, love, or business, change can be daunting, anxiety-inducing- and just plain hard. Sometimes, they work seamlessly; in other cases, they don't pan out at all.

For Malta-based MLB Construction Services, transitions have been crucial to its success. The company, ranked annually by Albany Business Review among the Top 10 contractors in the area, has now been in operation more than seven and a half decades and is, arguably, as strong as ever. It must, therefore, be doing something right.

After two successful leadership transitions (and one that did not work out so well), the Saratoga County construction mainstay is working on another one in order to propel it well beyond 2023 - its 76th year in existence - toward what it hopes will be its centennial in 2047.

"Since we did have two transitions that worked, it seemed to me, 'Let's see if we can try the same thing again,'" said MLB president Jim Dawsey, a 44-year employee, in a recent telephone interview. "The third time's the charm."





Dawsey and executive vice president Scott Shepherd were part of the company's second successful leadership transition. That transition process took around seven years, beginning in 2002, 55 years after the company was founded as McManus, Longe & Brockwehl, Inc. That was back in 1947, when they were operating out of Albany.

"The original founders were real entrepreneurs," said Dawsey, 71, a Schenectady native and current Saratoga Springs resident. "They each had their own piece of the company and what they handled... One was the financial and marketing guy, John McManus; one was the operations guy, Fred Longe; and then the engineer was Don Brockwehl."

From a humble beginning in the attic of Longe's home, the three men slowly built up the company, whose name was changed to MLB Industries in the mid-1970s and then to MLB Construction during the Dawsey-Shepherd transition. From a handful of clients in the late 1940s, the original threesome created what is now a multimillion-dollar enterprise with over 100 employees.

"We've averaged way more than \$50 million a year" in gross billings on projects, said Dawsey, company president since 2009. In 2022, in fact, the company totaled \$92 million in gross billings and, since its inception, has done more than \$2 billion in construction volume.

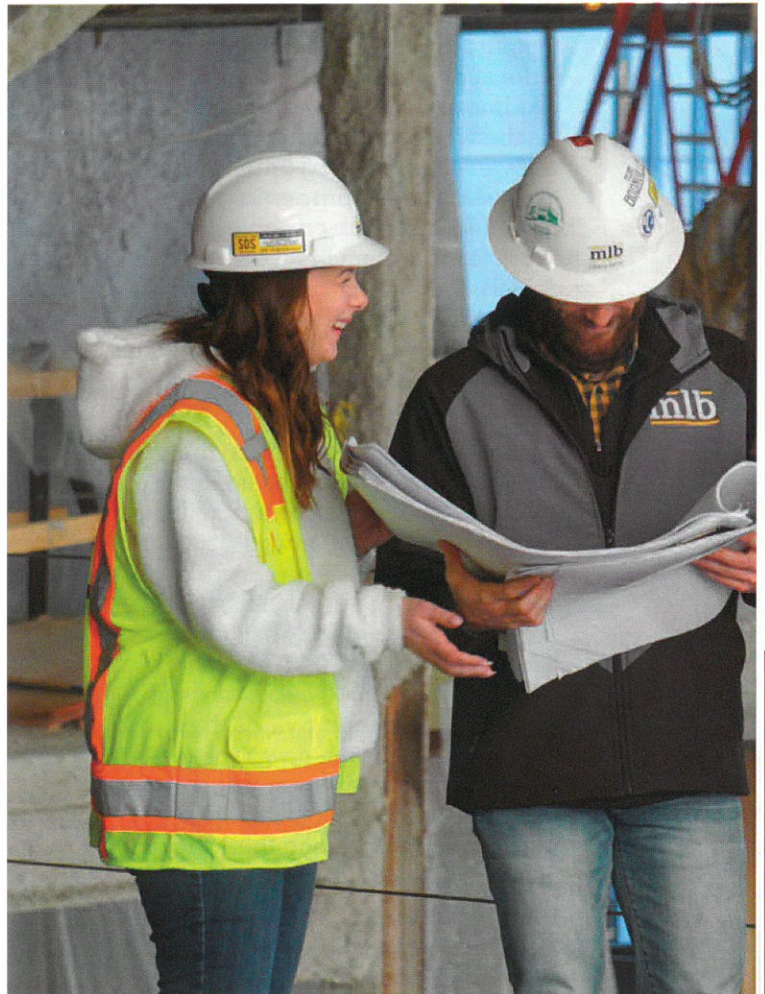
When Dawsey and Shepherd step down from their jobs, they will turn over the company leadership to current Chief Financial Officer, Aleisha Campbell and the firm's two vice presidents, Brian Douglass and Jeff Lino.

"We're going to give these three enough training over the next five years that I should be able to be phased out by then," Dawsey said of the transition process that began early in 2023.

By all estimates, Campbell, Douglass, and Lino should take over a humming enterprise with plenty of clients. Thus far, in its three-quarters of a century, MLB has been extremely busy.

"We've done thousands of projects over the years," said Dawsey, who said he still enjoys going to work every day, typically arriving at 5 a.m.

"We've done 70 projects in Saratoga; we've done probably 150 in Albany," Dawsey added. "We've worked with Price Chopper since 1988, and we've probably done a hundred projects for them." With the Hannaford Brothers supermarket chain, Dawsey estimates that MLB has completed over 300 projects for them since they expanded into New York from Maine. That includes building stores not just here in New York but in New Hampshire, Vermont, North Carolina, Virginia, and Florida.



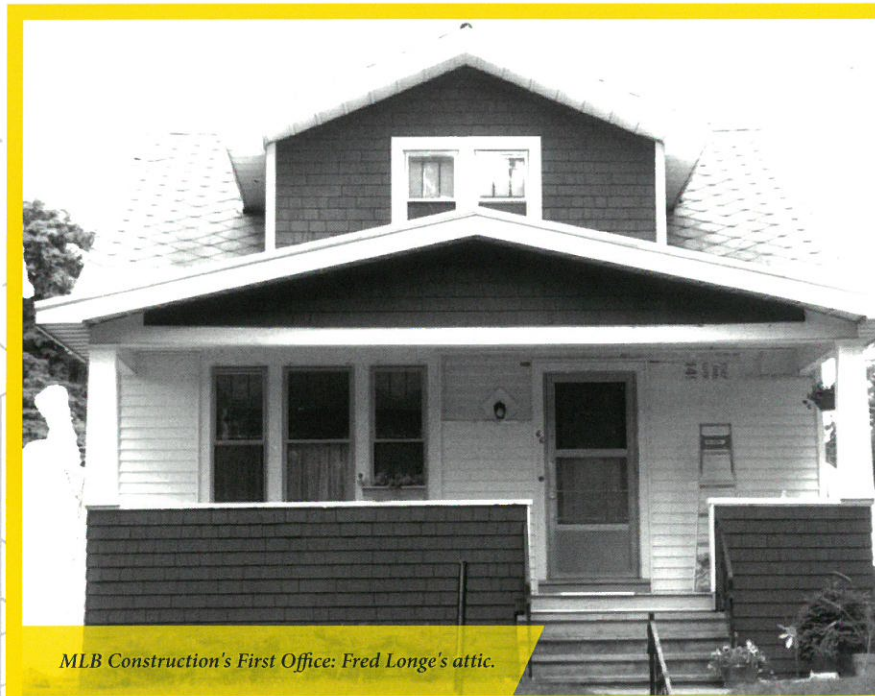
I'm really excited. I'm happy that we're still alive and kicking after 76 years and, hopefully, this next crew will bring us up to the 100-year level.

– JIM DAWSEY, PRESIDENT, MLB CONSTRUCTION SERVICES, LLC

Over the years, MLB has completed numerous projects in the fields of education (including work at RPI and Skidmore College), medical (such as the Nathan Littauer Hospital in Gloversville), housing (including redeveloping 41 properties in Schenectady and performing a work force project in Albany for lower- and middle-income residents, respectively), retail, and hospitality, among others. In addition to its Malta headquarters, MLB also has a branch in Apex, N.C.

Memorable projects include the nearly year-long 2019 construction of the 1863 Club at the Saratoga Race Course track; the Morocco pavilion at EPCOT in Walt Disney World in Florida in the early 1970s; the foundations for the GlobalFoundries facility in Malta in 2010, at which MLB poured 62,000 cubic yards of concrete (more cubic yards than were poured for the new Yankee Stadium project the year prior); a distinguished visitors center at West Point in 2011; and the Ashokan Reservoir project, completed in 1983.

The latter was "one of the projects I worked on that I found the most interesting," Dawsey said of installing a power plant at the reservoir, a few miles southwest of Woodstock, N.Y.



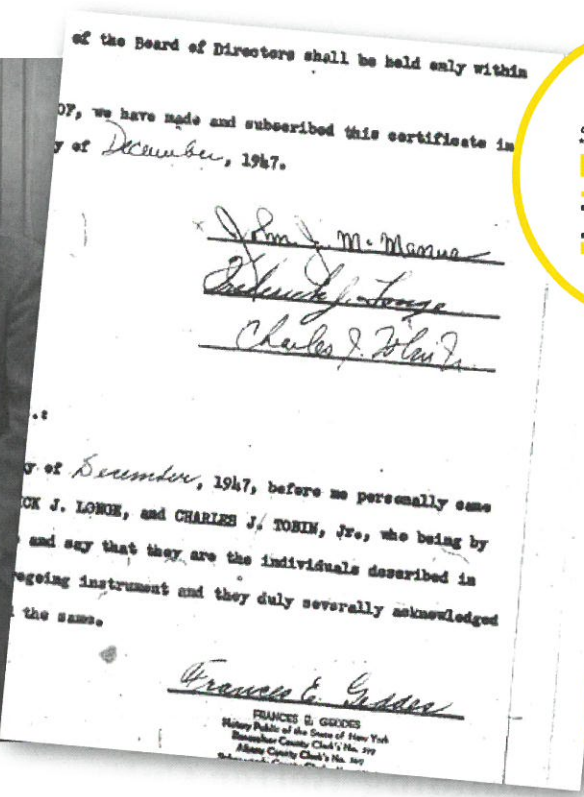
MLB Construction's First Office: Fred Longe's attic.



MLB Construction's Fourth Office: Northway Lane.



From Left to Right: MLB Construction Services Founders Jim McManus, Fred Longe, and Don Brockwehl.



"We excavated the whole area where the [town] fountain was, we went down a hundred feet, and we built a hydroelectric plant on the outlet of the water flowing down to New York City." After installing turbines and generators, "we covered the whole thing up and put the fountain back, and nobody even noticed there was a giant hydroelectric plant underground on the end of the Ashokan Reservoir."

Among other projects, MLB has been working on the two-phase Albany Airport renovation, an \$80 million endeavor.

Originally, "we built the first phase of the parking garage, we built the bridge, and now we're ripping the bridge down, ripping down the rotunda, and we're building a new bridge, a new parking garage, and we're renovating the whole interior of the airport itself," Dawsey said.

Construction work is nothing new to Dawsey, who started as a laborer as a young man— not a carpenter like his father, grandfather, and an uncle before him. He got a taste of construction as a child, going to his father's worksites and taking in the various jobs that made up a project. After graduating from Manhattan College in the Bronx in 1975 with a civil engineering degree, he figured he would soon get a job in the Big Apple.

"I was hanging around with a lot of

New York City kids, and I thought, 'I'm never going to go back upstate; they're a bunch of hicks.'"

But the first job offer he received was from an Albany contractor, August Bohl, so back upstate he went – and has remained ever since. He worked for Bohl for a few years, got married, then sought another job. He was hired by MLB in 1979 and never strayed.

Two years earlier, according to Dawsey, the three original MLB owners had tried to make an executive transition with three of its employees, but the plan didn't work out and was scrapped. In 1987, McManus, Longe, and Brockwehl attempted another transition with Tom Eckert, Bryan Fox, and Dawsey's father (also named Jim, who had preceded his son there). That one stuck, and by the mid-1990s, the company, then MLB Industries, had its new leaders. The elder Dawsey, a partner-owner, was named Vice President of Operations until his retirement in 1997.

The Malta business has won five Build New York awards, the last one completed in 2021 in New York's capital city, for which MLB also won a New York State Excellence in Historic Preservation award.

"We renovated the Nabisco Baking Company building in the south end of Albany and turned it into the new [Capital Repertory Theatre] building," Dawsey said. When MLB

began the project, "the building was barely standing. We went in, and we structurally reinforced the whole thing and put a 300-seat amphitheater in there."

In 2018, a lightning bolt struck Saratoga Springs City Hall, and the subsequent fire and water damage from fighting the blaze left the two upper floors in ruins. MLB renovated the entire building and, for that effort, won national recognition in 2022 from the American Public Works Association under the category of small cities/rural communities: a Public Works Project of the Year award for historical preservation and restoration.

According to Dawsey, 88% of MLB's projects are "repeat business" clients. "That says to me that we're giving them what they want - they want an honest contractor that gives them good quality, and when their next project comes up, they'll typically give us a call."

"We're actually in a growth mode right now," said Dawsey, who added that MLB has completed more than \$90 million in projects in 2023, "and we're set up to do \$100 million next year. I'm really excited. I'm happy that we're still alive and kicking after 76 years and, hopefully, this next crew will bring us up to the 100-year level."

MLB can be contacted at mlbind.com or by calling 518-289-1371. 