

A King Rules in Alabama

BY BARBARA SLOAN

Having just celebrated its 75th anniversary in 2000, Volkert & Associates continues to be ranked as one of the top engineering, architectural, planning and environmental consulting firms in the United States. And CEO Keith King is leading the way

When exploring the Southeast, a traveler is destined to repeatedly drive on or across, park, fly, chug, or zip into endless projects designed and constructed by Volkert & Associates, Inc.

From the Perdido Pass Bridge in Florida to the Lake Pontchartrain Causeway in Louisiana, from the Mobile Municipal Airport terminal complex in Alabama to the Smithsonian metro station in Washington, D.C., and from the Port of Miami to Birmingham's VisionLand Amusement Park parking lot, Volkert has designed literally thousands of miles of roadways and bridges, ports, lots, stations, and terminals since 1925.

Originally situated in New Orleans, as Doullut & Ewin, the firm once specialized in waterfront construction and heavy foundation projects. During World War II, the company dedicated its labor to military projects. Spokesperson Suzanne Fornaro says navy and merchant marine shipyards designed by Doullut & Ewin played a major role in the production of "Liberty Ships," greatly contributing to the war effort.

In 1946, the company moved to Mobile to become part of the Waterman Steamship Corporation family and was reorganized as J.P. Ewin, Inc. Renamed Ewin Engineering Corporation in 1950, the firm emerged as an engineering leader in south Alabama. Many projects, including the Alabama State Docks, the

Grand Hotel at Point Clear, the Battle House Hotel, and the design of numerous streets for the city integrated the company into the fabric of the Mobile community.

Also in 1946, David G. Volkert, a professional engineer and graduate of Cornell University, arrived in Mobile with Waterman as president of Southern Industries. Volkert acquired controlling interest in Ewin in 1954 and moved into offices on Savannah Street in downtown Mobile. By 1963, the company had been renamed Volkert & Associates.

Volkert's modern-day vision serves the 21st century firm. "Today, Americans are promised a future of economic growth and quality of life," says Fornaro. "As we tell people on our website: Central to achieving this promise of national growth and abundance is the development of the nation's infrastructure—roads, bridges, airports, utilities, ports, industrial complexes, and buildings. Our past accomplishments have put us in a position to be in the forefront of providing these improvements. We are committed to focusing our professional capabilities toward enhancing America's future by improving the environment and the quality of life."

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tal consulting firms in the United States.

In a humorous turn of words, the man who serves in all three top positions of Volkert—chairman of the board, president, and CEO—is also a king: Keith King, that is. He explains, "Volkert is in the upper one percent of engineering design firms in the nation. *Engineering News-Record's Top 500 Design Firms Sourcebook 2000* ranks Volkert as 199th overall and 45th in transportation out of the 500 firms listed. We are also 50th in the Engineer/Architect category [based on commercial, institutional and industrial work] of the top 300 firms listed in *Building Design and Construction*." In 12 design offices located across the Southeast, Volkert employs nearly 500 staff members. The firm has additional right-of-way and construction engineering inspection field offices located throughout the Southeastern and Atlantic states.

King, who was also the chairman of the Alabama Business Council in 2000, laughs a little about his three titles, as well as his name "King. "After working a couple of years for another firm in Baton Rouge," he recalls, "I started out with what was then Ewin Engineering Corporation as a design engineer just two years out of Auburn. I progressed through various departments and positions until 1983 when I became president and CEO. Basically, I have been with the same company for my entire career—for 41 years."

He says his own personal roots are in Alabama and he is glad the company has grown to its present success from his own home state. "We like our location, because we are in a central position for the markets we serve, which are mainly the 10 states of the Southeast. We have offices around the country, but the Mobile site is a good central spot for home base."

One of Volkert's slogans is "transportation is our business." Volkert's transportation services are provided through two main divisions—roadways and structures. The firm's roadway design and engineering projects include major interstate projects, both rural interstate and urban expressway; state and county roads; interchange improvements; tunnels; and complex multilevel interchanges. And its bridge designs include everything from small canal or stream crossings to prestigious award-winning structures that span rivers, lakes and bays.

As King points out, the task of completing a transportation artery goes far beyond the asphalt or concrete facility on which the traveler passes. With a multi-disciplined staff, the firm is able to successfully complete all aspects of the design of bridges and roadways from start to finish. "Obviously," King grins, "we are proud of having participated in some

of the major engineering projects in the region. Really, our primary focus is on design projects of the infrastructure. Our people are simply the best in the region at this stuff."

One of King's favorite projects ever was the Interstate-10 Twin Bridges across Mobile Bay for which the company was inducted into the State of Alabama Engineering Hall of Fame. Volkert was honored for bringing significant recognition to the State of Alabama. The same project catapulted the firm into the national Engineering Hall of Fame in 1990. Another cherished design was again in Mobile, the Cochrane/Africatown USA Bridge over the Mobile River. Also winning a national award, this project was named the Outstanding Engineering Achievement in the USA in 1992 by the National Society of Professional Engineers.

But the building of roadways and bridges for car and truck transportation is not Volkert's only specialty. Since the firm's early years in the 1920s, waterfront construction and heavy foundation projects have been a specialty, ranging from total port facilities for ocean-going ships to renovating existing docks. And since 1946, the company has provided design services for the construction of airports, including the development of new airport sites and upgrading and expanding existing airport facilities.

Volkert also has an architectural division that has created buildings to serve government, education, healthcare, business, transportation, utilities, and other public and private clients. Keith King is most pleased with the many schools the firm has designed throughout Alabama's Jefferson and Shelby counties and in the cities of Dothan and Mobile, where they were involved in a \$200 million K-12 school building program.

"Also, I guess one thing in this state of arch rivalry that we can be proud of is that our architectural program has designed buildings at University of Alabama and Auburn," he says laughing. "And we are pleased with the work done at both universities. We take seriously our ability to design not only a functional building, but a comfortable and pleasant environment where people can work, play,

learn, worship, heal, visit and live. Volkert's designs reflect sensitivity to the owner, the people who use the buildings, and the natural surroundings."

Other major areas of Volkert's services include communication design services; comprehensive assistance in landscape architecture, recreation planning and design, and urban design; and multi-discipline consulting engineering. Clients include the federal government, state departments of transportation, county

and Dalton, Georgia to handle this variety of work. Throughout constant growth, the home office has remained in Mobile, a location well loved by employees. "Alabama is a state that has good people," King says. "It is not a rich state, but has good resources. Its universities turn out top-notch engineers. The work ethic is good. We can maintain steady growth here and there are always emerging opportunities for us. Alabama continues to have tremendous potential. Many

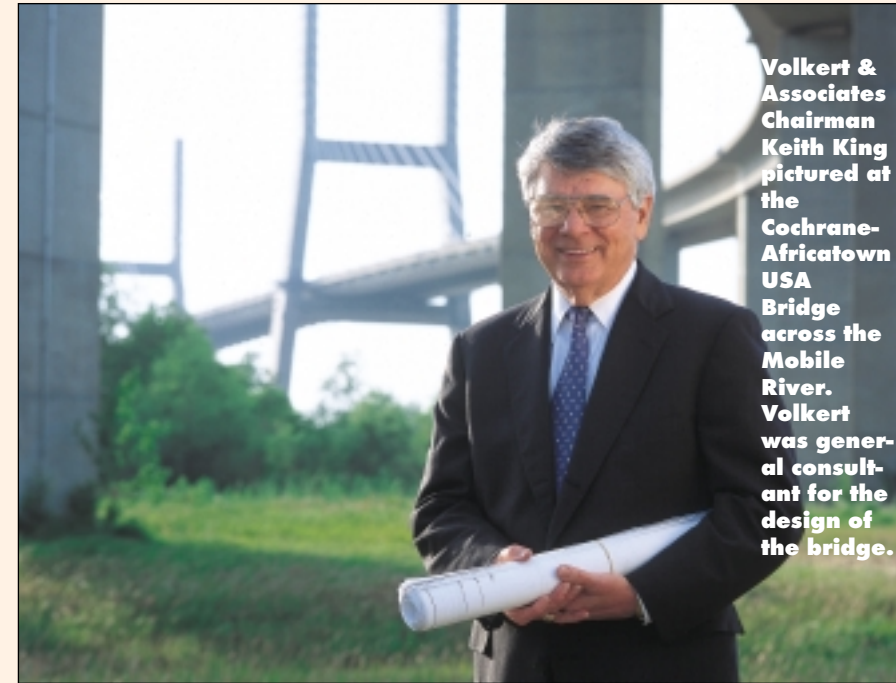
people are working to resolve the few problems our business climate does have here."

Nothing stands in the way for Volkert growth in Alabama. "It's up to us to participate in opportunities we find here," King says. "Overall, the state doesn't have the cost of living some states do; it is reasonable to live here. Employees enjoy a good quality of life and that is important to our workers. The economy is stable. Culture and arts are varied in Mobile and the community in Mobile is very participatory. People give time and money to charity and activities. It's a

fine old Southern city with plenty of elegance."

Volkert & Associate's philosophy is to encourage employees to be proactive in the community. "Mobile is a very caring and giving community," King says. "We work with the Adopt-a-School program. A number of employees go into the schools and work, interacting with students at different events. Education is so important and we give back to our community in this way. Our engineers lead an Explorer's Scouts program each year, taking young people on field trips to engineering sites." The company also works with the Ronald McDonald House, the Mobile Area Education Foundation, the Mobile Library, and on various Chamber of Commerce committees.

As Keith King says, "I am proud of our people—our associates—not only for what they accomplish in their profession, which is great, but also in what they can achieve in their community outreach. That they are balanced in these things is what pleases me the most." ■



Volkert & Associates Chairman Keith King pictured at the Cochrane-Africatown USA Bridge across the Mobile River. Volkert was general consultant for the design of the bridge.

commissions, city governments and the private sector. Volkert also offers an immense range of construction services, including program management, construction engineering inspection services, program management for public school systems, school facility assessment and assistance with planning and managing HUD projects.

During its 75-year history, Volkert has been involved in such diverse projects as a parking facility for a 70-acre amusement park to the design for a new boardwalk and wall in front of the pavilions on a public beachfront. Since the early '70s, subsidiary Volkert Environmental Group has provided such services as assessments and impact studies for major thoroughfares; site assessments; delineation, restoration and permitting of jurisdictional wetlands; biological assessments; flora/fauna investigation; coastal zone management; and many other related services.

Keith King points out that Volkert operates its 15 offices in Florida, Chattanooga, New Orleans, Alexandria,