

## FEATURE

# Building a strong foundation

**Corporate Citizen:**  
Cutler Associates Inc.,  
Worcester  
BY KIM CIOTTONE

**2003 Business Leaders**  
OF THE YEAR

Cutler Associates has bucked industry tradition since its founding when it comes to a longstanding custom of giving expensive liquor to clients during the holiday season. Instead, Cutler ([www.cutlerassociates.com](http://www.cutlerassociates.com)), a Worcester-based design/build construction firm, has raised toasts to the health of its community by raising money — making contributions “in the seven-figure range” to non-profit, charitable and cultural organizations chosen by its clients, employees, subcontractors and vendors.

This longstanding practice is only one of many of the endeavors that led the *Worcester Business Journal* to bestow its first-ever Corporate Citizenship award to Cutler Associates. The Corporate Citizen award, which in its inaugural year is being co-sponsored by the Clark University Graduate School of Management, will be given to companies that espouse a pre-selected set of business ethics. (See introduction)

Cutler Associates Inc.'s commitment to “giving back” isn't limited to cash donations. It's an integral part of the company's formal mission statement and founding philosophy. Cutler Associates encourages and supports its employees in pursuing their own personal charitable and community involvement. Many employees have become intricately involved in such efforts as a result of the company's ethic.

#### The benefit multiplier

Examples include the design and construction of a new porch for Camp Harrington, a Worcester-based camp offering programs for children with special needs in 2002 and a new instructional kitchen at the Worcester Food Bank 2002. In completion of that effort, Cutler Architect and Project Manager Shawn McGuinness and her team spent more than 300 hours of Cutler-paid time designing the



Frederic Mulligan (in trench coat) with Cutler crew members at a job site on Worcester's East Mountain St. Left to right: Jerry Sumner (standing), Terry Sumner (in cab) and Mulligan.

2,000-square-foot, \$200,000 commercial kitchen, classroom and office complex in formerly vacant space at the food bank's Shrewsbury warehouse and headquarters. The kitchen today is used to train people how to cook as well as to provide hot meals for Food Bank recipients.

McGuinness says Cutler's added contributions of taking on projects for charitable and non-profit organizations “is just a great effort.” Cutler, she says, “is generally very giving, even in not-so-good times like during this past year.” The Worcester Food Bank project, she says, “was very enjoyable... I felt every day that I was helping people in need. ...I was able to work closely with executive director of the food bank who didn't have knowledge about architecture,” she adds.

Cutler has also completed several charitable projects for the Children's Friend Center in Worcester. “The benefit there is so substantial,” says Mulligan. “The organization gets the work, our people don't get laid off, which is

terrific, but they feel so good about using their skills in that way -the benefit just multiplies and multiplies.”

#### Spreading the wealth

Company founder Melvin Cutler, who still serves as the company's chair, established the eponymous Melvin S. Cutler Charitable Foundation in August 1980. It's funded through a donation of a percentage of the company's annual profits which, Mulligan explains, varies year to year based on profitability and needs of the trust, as well as varying direct contributions from Melvin Cutler, also based on needs of the trust.

Cutler Associates also operates offices in Allentown, PA and Tampa, FL, where Melvin Cutler now resides for half the year. Melvin Cutler is the founder of Worcester-based Cutler Capital Management, LLC and co-founder of Worcester-based Flagship Bank and Trust Co., along with a partner, the late Harold Cotton. He's also founder of Madison Savings

and Loan in Tampa, FL -Cutler Associates' first customer. While he's no longer associated with Flagship Bank, Cutler remains chair of Madison Savings and Loan.

Mulligan carries out Cutler's ethos. A 32-year veteran of Cutler Associates and its first full-time employee, Mulligan has not only guided the company's growth, but has sustained the standard for corporate citizenship set by Cutler. A former director of Worcester Business Development Corp. and past president of the New England Chapter of the Design-Build Institute of America, Mulligan is noted consistently by his cohorts for his humble approach and high level of ethics.

#### Community-building - literally

Cutler specializes in the industrial, health-care and education sectors. It has won numerous awards for excellence by such organizations as the Associated Builders and Contractors and the American Institute of Architecture. Local award-winning projects include Clark University's Jonas Clark Hall, a comprehensive renovation and restoration of the college's 19th century signature academic center; renovation and expansion of Higgins Laboratories at WPI and a specialized memory disorder wing at Notre Dame du Lac Assisted Living Facility in Worcester. The company also recently completed a historic restoration of Worcester Academy's Warner Hall and a telecommunications theater, primate holding facilities, and new glass front and water wall at the Ecotarium in Worcester.

John Lapoint, president of owner representative firm Lexington-based Project Planning and Management and 12-year veteran to the industry, worked with Cutler on both the Worcester Academy and Ecotarium projects. “They are certainly one of the top firms that I have worked with,” says Lapoint. Regarding Worcester Academy, he notes, “they pulled together a team of craftsman that restored some of the frescos and the paintings on the ceiling -very complicated, tricky project with a fantastic end product.” Lapoint, who was also

extended the opportunity to donate money to a charity of his choice.

#### It takes the team

A successful organization relies on a team effort, Mulligan says, in which employees are envisioned as volunteers. A recent incident in which a Cutler floor slab finisher attempting to set in a cement floor during recent frigid weather, stayed in the building all night to make sure the job got done right, models that point. “It was too cold, the floor wouldn't set up,” he says. “Those workers probably started work that day at 6:00 a.m. that morning and didn't leave until 6:00 the next morning. That,” he says, “is a voluntary effort. You can't make somebody do that.”

Most companies, he says, have incentive plans that tie employee bonuses to company performance. Cutler has a formal incentive plan, but with broader objectives. They are: bringing a project in on-budget and on-schedule, and quality, safety and customer satisfaction on which a project team is scored as a group.

#### Long-term relationships over short-term growth

Cutler Associates, which made the *Worcester Business Journal's* Top Growth Companies list in 2001 and 2002, has felt the impact of a down economy this past year as its corporate and institutional customers curtailed spending, and as growth plans are put on hold. Cutler's long-term relationships with its clients and employees, in an industry historically thought of as very seasonal, Mulligan and Cutler say, were key to weathering that storm.

Every year, Cutler sends letters to all of its constituents, shareholders, subcontractors, vendors, and employees asking them to designate charities to which the company will make donations in their name - \$100 for all employees, and higher amounts for some clients and subcontractors. Cutler then gives them the check to distribute to the charity.

If that's not enough, last year in celebration of the company's 30th anniversary — and Melvin Cutler's 70th birthday — the company, in addition to its regular foundation giving, drew lots from customer and employee lists giving 30 people the opportunity to give \$1,000 away. In honor of his birthday, Melvin Cutler also gave 70 people a chance to give \$1,000.

#### Doing the right thing - all the time

Mulligan himself receives high praises from clients and co-workers alike. “I have seen him work tirelessly, not only in our company, but in the community,” says Wakely, who has worked with Mulligan for more than 30 years and regards him as an ambassador to bot the community and the industry.

This past Christmas, an employee who learned that The Rainbow Child Development Center at Worcester's Plumley Village was in need of gifts for needy children organized fellow employees to donate gifts. Cutler Associates then threw in a dollar for dollar match. “Everyone had to wrap their presents. We loaded all in one of the company's red pickup trucks and drove them down to the Rainbow Child Center with the matched donation,” says Mulligan. “We backed up somebody else's leadership role. When people know they can have a creative idea like that, they tend to have creative ideas,” says Mulligan. “It's a great boost. That day the pickup truck went there, we felt like Santa Claus.”

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(Editor's note: You can listen to a 30-minute interview with Melvin S. Cutler, founder and chair of Cutler Associates Inc., the Melvin S. Cutler Charitable Foundation, and Cutler Capital Management, and David Genies, president of Cutler Capital Management, on February 1 at 10 p.m. on *The Business Beat* on Worcester radio station WICN 90.5 FM and at [www.wicn.org](http://www.wicn.org))

#### Cutler Associates Inc.

## at a glance

Note: 2002 figure is an estimate.  
(1) Figures represent charitable giving, done through the Melvin S. Cutler Charitable Foundation, but does not include in-kind donations of employee time on various projects.  
Source: Cutler Associates Inc.

