

Mahota Associates

Principal Owner
Joseph Mahota

“ My mom told me.....you know Joe, architects don't go to school to find a job, they go to college to be educated to become leaders. ”

MAHOTA ASSOCIATES
bringing architecture + building together



Success Magazine: With over 22 years experience in the industry, how would you define success?

Joseph Mahota: My personal definition of success has evolved over the years, though the core principle of family first never waivers. Growing up in a 1200 square foot house with one bathroom, four sisters, a saintly mother, and an alcoholic father was dysfunctional on good days and absolutely embarrassing the rest of the time. For that reason success, to me, is first providing stability for my beautiful wife and two fantastic children. That principle is paramount while pursuing professional goals for myself and my company.

SM: When did you first become interested in architectural design?

JM: We had been given a project individually as fifth grade students at Immaculate Conception School in Schenectady, NY, to create pieces that could be used to depict an Indian Village. Well, I didn't know Lewis Mumford at the time but we were both thinking the same way. "Make no small plans" was his motto. I found a sheet of 4x8 plywood in our garage, framed the edges with 2x4's, filled the shallow box with three inches of dirt from my mother's garden and proceeded to build— out of toothpicks—a full blown settlement including teepees, long-houses, perimeter fences, a stream, a fire pit... the whole enchilada. My mother and sisters helped me carry it and place it on the hood of my grandmother's '67 Cadillac and the family got in the car and drove my project a block up the road to

school. The nuns were shocked, but allowed it into the school. The happiest people were the exterminators who were chasing ants for about four months.



SM: How did your experience at Syracuse University help pave the way for your success?

JM: Syracuse was then, and is still today, a very big and emotional part of my life. I had been rejected by the two schools my father wanted me to attend, my sister was already at SU and she convinced me to come see the school and meet a couple of architecture students she knew, one of which runs the state codes division today. When I walked into "studio" that was it. I saw myself

there. But there was a snag. I was rejected by the architecture school but admitted for liberal arts. I quickly found out what it would take to transfer in. I loaded up on history and political science classes, amassed a portfolio of sketches, and pledged a fraternity. My persistence paid off. I pulled a 3.85 GPA that year, reapplied to the architecture program and was accepted the following year. Three years later I presented one of my design studio projects in front of a jury that included the dean of the school along with a number of visiting critics from Spain, Austria, and Italy. When my presentation concluded the jury was pleased and suggested I would be a perfect candidate to study in the Florence Program abroad the following year. I explained to the jury I would love to go to Florence but my technical classes had eaten away at my once high GPA and I had been rejected recently by the program's administrators. This presentation was on a Friday. By the following Monday, the dean had worked out the rest and I was packing for Florence. The atypical path through the program allowed me to focus on design, culminating in receiving the James Britton Memorial Award for Outstanding Senior Design Thesis. I just love my Alma Mater.

SM: You turned down an opportunity to get your Master's Degree at Great Britain's prestigious Architectural Association. Why?

JM: At that point in my career I was five years removed from school, I was back home, three years into my marriage with my high school sweetheart, and more theoretical paper architecture

didn't have the appeal or align with what I was accomplishing and working toward.

SM: What do you specialize in?

JM: I've enjoyed the benefits associated with the Design-Build method of Project Delivery, primarily in the private sector. It has come a long way over the twenty years I've been exposed to it. Integrated Project Delivery is its successor and we are ahead of the curve there as well. In short, both methods put all parties at the table sharing risk and reward more evenly between owner, builder, and architect. Public work like schools, government buildings, and the like would benefit greatly from these methods developed in the private sector. As we move forward and project costs and stewardship responsibilities rise exponentially, a more integrated and intelligent approach to design and building is paramount in reducing the current inefficiencies in the building industry and the industry's overall stress on the planet.

SM: You are a LEED Accredited Professional and leader in the sustainable building movement. Why is this important to you?

JM: The fundamental principles of sustainable design are, and always have been, an essential part of what architects and informed owners understand to be good design. Good design is the backbone of all major architecture school curricula and all successful architectural firms. Sustainability and the Green Building movement is an important first step in changing our culture's disregard for earth's natural resources including America's excessive and historic pattern of waste. If we are to maintain any quality standard of living here in America, our culture must evolve and learn to do more with less, and sustainable buildings and communities have begun to prove we can, and will, do that. Green Buildings and Developments require owners and all players to revalue their investments for the life of the project, not just first costs. Yes, the real estate market will be much different moving forward.

SM: What project are you most proud of, and why?

JM: Our work on the Barton Mines Building in Glens Falls, NY. That was a successful project on so many levels. First the building project received a LEED Platinum Certification, the highest level of certification offered by the USGBC's LEED rating system and is 53% more energy efficient than a basic "code" building. The building is one of only seven LEED Platinum Buildings in New York and the only one outside of NYC. Second, Mahota Associates was selected from a national call for entries as a finalist for Environmental Design + Construction Magazine's Excellence in Design Awards '08 for the project. Third, the project succeeded in bringing back to life a rundown half occupied 1800's building in the heart of the city, on the corner of Fountain Square in a community that really appreciates its history. And finally, projects like this one require a total team effort, lead by a passionate dedicated owner and a number of talented and dedicated professionals. It was an absolute pleasure working with the best of the best on this project.

SM: What is the most unique project you have worked on?

JM: The most unique project I've worked on was the building of the then new Bobsleigh Track on Mount VanHovenberg in Lake Placid, New York with BB&L from 1999 through 2000. BB&L was hired by Clough Harbor Associates as the Construction Manager for the project, which entailed removing the old luge track and constructing a new combined bob/luge/skeleton track that stretched down the mountain side for a mile. I was named Engineer in Charge. I shared the field office with the owner's chief consultant Septra Projects out of Kelowna British Columbia, Clough's chief coordinating engineer and BBL's field superintendent. Proper information, coordination and schedule were the name of the game every day. There were three survey crews on the mountain each day, constantly monitoring tolerance of the work. There was no looking back on this one, the track needed to be completed in time for the first ever Winter Goodwill

Games. Everything but the design, it seemed, was in place and ready. On a specific date, camera crews from around the world were going to descend on Lake Placid to see their world class athletes slide on the newest track in the world. Ted Turner would christen the new track, satellites would televise it around the world live—no pressure. I love a challenge. The team performed exceptionally well and the project was a great success. Cameras rolled on time, babies were kissed, celebrities came to see and be seen, and the Heineken flowed for three days straight, issuing in the inaugural Good Will Games.

SM: As an entrepreneur, you must keep a very busy schedule. How are you able to juggle all aspects of your life?

JM: My wife Shelley and I have been in love and together for 31 years, married for 21 of them. She keeps a master schedule of our son and daughter's school, sporting, and social events as well as her own appointments and all of my functions. When conflicts arise we discuss and concur. We're hockey/ lacrosse parents after all...so you know how we can be! My wife and kids, as well as the rest of my family, are extremely supportive and very proud of what I have accomplished in my life—especially considering when I was younger it seemed to everyone who knew me that I was constantly getting into trouble for something, somewhere.

SM: What is the best piece of advice you have ever received?

JM: Never sell your soul. (My dad)

SM: What is the most rewarding aspect of what you do each day?

JM: Having created for myself the opportunity to excel at being creative and overcoming the negative influences of my early childhood.

SM: What motivates you?

JM: I am a goal oriented person. It is an inner drive that I've had all my life. I've always wanted to be the best at whatever I did. As a professional, I provide that drive to every client I serve.

SM: What one word describes you best?

JM: Leader. My mom told me after I was finally accepted into the architecture program at Syracuse: "You know Joe, architects don't go to school to find a job, they go to college to be educated to become leaders." My mom was always right.



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