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Zero tolerant: Firm aids N.Y. recovery operations

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LOWER PROVIDENCE - When you imagine fathers and daughters working together, you might think of sand piles, sand castles and the seashore. But John J. Peirce Jr. and Jennifer L. Peirce are not your typical father/daughter team. Their engineering projects can be seen in the foundations of commercial buildings, major superhighways in the region and marine structures.

As a subcontractor for bridge builder Acrow Corporation of America, Peirce Engineering Inc. designed the steel towers, trusses and roadway decking for a 460-foot-long access bridge in New York at the site of the World Trade Center. The two-lane, modular truss bridge built by Acrow Corp. has been used in recovery operations at "Ground Zero" since it was designed in mid-January.

Peirce Engineering completed the final design in less than a day so Acrow could build the galvanized steel access bridge over a two-week period in January. The bridge replaced a dirt-covered ramp initially used by rescuers to reach the bottom of the site.

The company, based in Lower Providence Township, also designed a 130-foot, two-lane bridge to extend the West Side Highway in Manhattan over the Ground Zero site. That bridge was built in late February.

The structural and geotechnical engineering firm operates from the professionally appointed basement office of the Peirce home. High-powered personal computers using AutoCAD 2000 LT software are used to produce engineering calculations and structural plans. The designs are printed on a 42-inch color plotter and eight to 15 copies are shipped to each construction client.

Engineering design fees range from \$2,000 to \$20,000, depending on the complexity of the project and the number of hours spent on each.

In 2000, When Allan A. Myers Inc. of Worcester needed structural design work to build a concrete retaining wall outside Building 29-C at Merck & Co. Inc. of Upper Gwynedd, Peirce Engineering calculated the soil pressures and designed the wall.

That same year, Myers asked Peirce to analyze whether an underground fire protection water tank at the Merck West Point campus could be abandoned safely. Each engineering project cost less than \$2,000, Peirce said.

In 1998, Peirce designed the concrete foundation piers and 230 feet of retaining walls for an additional beef slaughter facility at Moyer Packing Company in Hatfield. D'Angelo Bros. Inc. of Philadelphia paid \$3,700 for the engineering work and built the facility.

The engineers have also worked for Driscoll Construction Co. Inc. of Spring House, Haines & Kibblehouse Inc. of Skippack and URS Corp. of Whitpain. They have designed sound barriers for the Schuylkill Expressway, excavation support walls for the widening of Route 202 in Upper Merion and sluice gates for the Schuylkill Canal in Oaks.

Peirce Engineering will celebrate its 10th anniversary in August. The two-person company completed more than 90 engineering projects last year.

A senior engineer, John Peirce has resided in Lower Providence for 19 years. He grew up in Philadelphia, graduated from Holy Ghost Prep and earned engineering and geotechnical degrees at Drexel University in 1973 and 1978, respectively.

After working at Schnabel Foundation Co. in Upper Merion and The Conduit & Foundation Corp. in Bala Cynwyd for 27 years, Peirce formed his engineering firm in 1992.

Jennifer Peirce graduated from Methacton High School and earned civil and architectural engineering degrees at Drexel University in 1995. She worked at The Conduit & Foundation Corp., Urban Engineers of Philadelphia and Associated Engineering Consultants for seven years before joining her father's engineering firm.

A love for mathematics and engineering obviously runs in the Peirce family, because a son has also entered the field. John Peirce, 22, is currently working as an engineer for Schnabel Foundation. As far as two other daughters, Cari Peirce is a freshman business major at Drexel University and Meredith Peirce works as a graphic designer.

The elder Peirce served as president of the Philadelphia section of the American Society of Civil Engineers from 1999 to 2000. He was selected as the 2002 Engineer of the Year by the local chapter of the American Society of Civil Engineers.

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