



John O'Connor

John O'Connor was only just getting started in his engineering career when the Deputy Minister of the day called him into his office and told him about a large healthcare project about to get started and that he was reassigning O'Connor to the project, starting his career on healthcare projects. "Given the large, complex project I was assigned, I had the privilege of working with many of the most experienced and competent people in the industry. That experience is invaluable and gave me a big start into the design and construction field, ultimately influencing my future in the industry," says O'Connor.

O'Connor started working in the construction industry during his summers while studying engineering, working in Alberta on building construction and in Nova Scotia on highway construction. Upon graduating in 1981 in Civil Engineering from the Technical University of Nova Scotia (now known as the Faculty of Engineering of Dalhousie University), his first job was project manager on building projects for the Province of Nova Scotia.

Starting on smaller building maintenance and alterations work, he then pivoted on to larger capital projects. From 1984 to 1996, O'Connor oversaw many hospital projects, including the Veterans Memorial Building at Camp Hill, the new Halifax Infirmary and Cape Breton Regional.

"During that period of my career, I spent the majority of my time working out of site offices, giving me opportunities to get to know many people and companies working in the construction industry," says O'Connor. "Fast forward to today and I've come full circle. As the VP of a new division with Nova Scotia Lands, I'm overseeing the redevelopment of the QEII and Cape Breton healthcare facilities, so a lot of memories are coming back that give me insight into bridging history between what we know then and what we know now in building today."

From 1996 to 2008, O'Connor worked as a Director of Engineering, Design and Construction with the Province of Nova Scotia and was responsible for Transportation and building projects delivery. This period provided him with many opportunities to work closely with industry associations, especially the Construction Association of Nova Scotia (CANS), connecting the way the Province and the industry do business, policy development, and procurement approaches.

From 2008 onwards, O'Connor worked as an executive director with the Province, with additional areas of responsibilities but remained the primary contact between the Province and CANS.

Recognizing that the world and the way we work in it is constantly changing, O'Connor thinks that the biggest challenges the industry faces is related to our working environment in the face of a global pandemic.

"There have always been increasing challenges around changing technologies, increased safety and regulatory demands, etc., but the impact from COVID-19 may be our biggest challenge yet," says O'Connor. "It is more important now than ever for industry to adapt in order to achieve future success in the industry."

Knowing that teamwork is the foundation of success, O'Connor has a deep understanding and appreciation for people working together to make projects and big things happen – something he's seen throughout his career. "There is a lot of value in people working together to create a healthy industry and build great projects," O'Connor shares. "For example, the Province needs the industry to build its projects, and the industry needs the Province for a significant share of the work. The industry thrives as a whole through a collaborative approach."

It is through this teamwork approach and putting in the time and effort to earn respect and recognition, that O'Connor chooses to lead. Something he often tells younger people, including his own children, is that hard work, dedication and perseverance pays off, even if it isn't obvious to you at the time. Says O'Connor, "I like to lead by example. I work hard, work fairly, treat people with respect, and create a positive work environment focused on results that we all can be proud of."

"Working in the construction industry is a very fulfilling career and I enjoy working with a lot of like-minded people that are well intended and proud of what they do," says O'Connor. "There is nothing more rewarding than driving around Nova Scotia and looking at the many infrastructure projects and thinking, 'I remember when we did that project' and thinking of the many companies and people that had a role in making it happen."

John O'Connor is the Vice President of the Healthcare Infrastructure Projects Division at Nova Scotia Lands. He served on CANS Board of Directors for many years and was and continues to be a strong voice and advocate for the construction industry. On behalf of CANS' Board of Directors, staff, members and volunteers, we celebrate John O'Connor as CANS 2020 Honourary Life Member.