

Valley Commercial Construction blazing vertical trail

By Jennifer DeWitt - September 18, 2023



President and CEO Greg Hass stands by a company history display at Valley Construction's headquarters in southwest Rock Island. CREDIT JENNIFER DEWITT

The lifeblood of **Valley Construction Co.** is the critical infrastructure projects that Quad Citians pay little mind to but rely on every single day.

The nearly century-old Rock Island company is the muscle behind building the roads we drive on, the bridges we cross and the runways that help transport us outside our bi-state region. In the construction industry, that is known as horizontal construction and Valley is quite proud of its reputation in that arena.

But for the past 20-some years, it also has been quietly becoming a force in vertical construction – erecting commercial buildings, schools additions, public safety buildings and other vertical construction. As Valley's third generation leader Greg Hass attests that slice of its business has been a well-kept secret – even to many of its customers.

“It became a deal in the community where we would see a new building going up and (say to the owners) ‘You didn’t call us for a price.’ And over and over, the company’s president and CEO would hear his customers say “I didn’t know you did buildings.”

To raise awareness of its vertical capabilities, the company spun off its commercial division in May to create a standalone affiliated entity known as Valley Commercial Construction.

While Valley has been the builder behind a number of high-profile projects such as the Rock Island Police Department's new police station and the Rock Island County Justice Center, Mr. Hass said there was a need to "sever that stigma of just being roads, bridges and airports."



Valley Construction has provided construction management services on several major Quad Cities projects, including the Rock Island Police Station.
CREDIT VALLEY CONSTRUCTION

By branching off Valley Commercial, it maintains the Valley name but more importantly, Mr. Hass said he hopes it makes existing clients – and potential ones – realize that Valley's companies can build a commercial project from start to finish. That includes from the site preparation and earthwork to underground utilities, paving, and actual construction of the building.

He knows it will be a challenge to re-educate the Quad Cities to all the company's capabilities. Particularly when Valley has built its reputation on past monumental, heavy highway projects such as the John Deere Expressway's extension from Moline's SouthPark Mall to Rock Island, construction of the Milan Beltway and its more recent involvement with the new Interstate 74 bridge on which it won five separate contracts. "We were the local go-to for Lunda (Construction, the main contractor) and did the subcontracting for Lunda," Mr. Hass said, describing Valley as "a jack of all trades" on the project.

Family legacy

Though Valley Commercial is a new entity, Mr. Hass said it builds on his family's long history in construction and construction management that dates back to the 1800s and his great grandfather Walter Hass, who launched Walter Hass Construction.

"My great grandfather was a vertical building builder," Mr. Hass said, adding that he made a name for himself after the Great Chicago Fire and a similar devastating fire that raged

through downtown Davenport.

“He built the first masonry fire-proof constructed building west of the Mississippi River in downtown Davenport,” Mr. Hass recalled. Built as the Peterson Paper and Bag Co., the historic building still stands strong at Second Street and Pershing Avenue and now is home to the Peterson Paper Company Lofts.

Mr. Hass said his great grandfather died at a young age, leaving his grandfather Arthur Hass to carry on the family business, which later would be led by Mr. Hass’ father and uncles: John, Jim and Bill Hass, who managed Valley Construction for nearly 50 years. The Valley Construction name was not incorporated until 1925.

In fact, Mr. Hass said the new I-74 bridge brought Valley full circle. “My grandfather (Arthur Hass) built one of the approaches to one of the original bridges,” he said, remarking how special it was to have his company there in the bridge’s beginning and now on its replacement.

Today, Valley Construction operates out of its headquarters in southwest Rock Island at 3610 78th Ave. West. Valley now is owned by the third generation of Hass family. Owners include: Greg Hass; Adam Hass, his cousin and vice president; and his uncles Jim and Bill Hass. (Former owner John Hass, Greg Hass’ father, is deceased). In addition, a fifth generation of the Hass family, Caleb Carius, now works at the company as a project manager. He is Greg Hass’ nephew.

The Hass construction bloodline even leads to his mother’s side. Her father and Greg Hass’ grandfather, Glen Perkins, invented the first concrete slip form paving machine, which he patented. He also had operated his own company, Quad Cities Construction.

Diversification and growth

Nearly on the eve of its 100th anniversary, Valley Construction has been experiencing sizable growth as it expands beyond its traditional heavy road construction. Today, it employs about 150 people – including 120 union workers – companywide and is extending its reach among its longtime clients and new ones.

“I’d say we’ve tripled in size in the last 10 years,” Mr. Hass said, crediting not only increased volume of its traditional work but by “branching off into other types of work. We do a lot in the nuclear world. The rail world is new to us.”

Just a few of its customers include Exelon Nuclear (now Constellation), the railroads, John Deere, Nestle Purina, Tyson, [Quad Cities International Airport](#) and area municipalities.

“I always say (we do) everything but a residential house. We do residential site development, build roads, the infrastructure, but we don’t do homes.”

Asked to rank the business volumes, he said Valley’s strength continues to be in roads and miscellaneous site work for commercial and industrial customers. It also has been gaining ground in the Construction Management (CM) arena, overseeing projects involving other subcontractors such as the Rock Island Police Station and the Rock Island County Justice Center. Mr. Hass said school remodels and expansions also have been a growth area. In fact, Valley is slated to begin work soon on a new multi-million dollar union hall for the International Union of Operating Engineers Local 150 – across the street from Valley’s own headquarters.

One of his proudest commercial projects, he said, was the recent redevelopment of the former Tri-Jewish Center into a new combined Rock Island Library/Two Rivers YMCA in Rock Island.

Valley also has had its share of demolition projects including the most high-profile one of late, the demolition of the former [Rock Island County Courthouse](#) in downtown Rock Island. But Valley crews also can be seen currently on Bettendorf’s Forest Grove Road, Interstate 80 and John Deere Road near the Interstate 74 intersection.

Valley tends to bid and land work within a 100-mile radius of its operations because as Mr. Hass said, hauling its heavy equipment any further away for a job decreases its competitiveness.

Client awareness

While the Valley Commercial Construction name and brand are still very young, Mr. Hass said it is gaining traction and leading to both more bid opportunities and an increased understanding of its breadth of services – beyond roads, bridges and airports.

“It’s what I always say, people think of a pop distributor as Pepsi,” he said. “They don’t think of them as water when they haul water distributed with Pepsi – to the grocery store – and other items.”

Still, he said Valley Commercial’s introduction is spurring familiar reactions from existing and potential clients who continue to say “I didn’t know you did vertical.”

“One of our mottos here is never tell a customer ‘no.’ So if a customer said ‘hey, we want you to build us a building,’ ... we find a way to do it,” he said. In fact, Mr. Hass said that is exactly how its commercial division has quietly grown in the past 20 years.

By the numbers: Valley Construction

1: Walter Hass built what was the first fireproof masonry building west of the Mississippi River in 1907 in downtown Davenport. And the first generation to launch and own Valley Construction is Arthur J. Hass, Walter Hass' son.

3: Generations of Hass family who have led the company: Arthur Hass, his son John Hass, and his grandson Greg Hass, the current president and CEO.

4: Generations of the Hass family to work at Valley Construction. But in all, five generations have been in the construction business beginning with Walter Hass, whose company pre-dated Valley. Caleb Carius (Greg Hass' nephew and Walter Hass' great-great grandson), who is a project manager, represents a fifth generation.

55: Number of years that the current most tenured employee, Herman Hammond, has worked for Valley. He was hired in 1968 is currently an equipment operator.

110: Union workers employed by Valley.

150: Total employees across the company, including 20 in its new entity Valley Commercial Construction.

260: The size of Valley's fleet in units, including vehicles, trucks and heavy equipment.

1925: The year Valley Construction was incorporated.

2025: The 100th anniversary of Valley Construction.

10,000+: The square footage of Valley Construction's current headquarters (minus its shop) in southwest Rock Island.

80,000: The total pounds of relief aid donations collected by Valley employees and delivered to help residents of Moore, Oklahoma, after a EF-5 tornado hit in 2013.

Source: Valley Construction

Valley Construction timeline

1901 – Walter Hass begins Walter Hass Construction Co.

1907 – Walter Hass oversees construction of the Davenport Paper & Bag Company – the first fireproof structure built west of the Mississippi River. Built in downtown Davenport

and eventually known as the Peterson Paper building, it is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and today houses the Peterson Paper Company Lofts.

1923 – Arthur J. Hass, Walter Hass' son, plants the roots for Valley Construction when he purchases an old steam mixer, a Model-T service truck, and a horse-drawn steel roller. The company's first project is an alley in Rock Island.

1925 – Valley Construction is incorporated in Illinois and becomes prequalified to bid work in Iowa.

1928 – Company purchases property in Rock Island on 35th Avenue for its new construction office, garage and yard.

1928 – Valley acquires a new 27-E Rex Paver and completes 25 blocks of city paving in Clinton, Iowa. Also purchases a 1928 Model-A Ford Roadster for a company car, which it still owns and has since been restored.

1929-1939 – Struggling to survive the stock market crash and The Great Depression, Valley diversifies into industrial work such as concrete floors and foundations.

1936 – Arthur Hass opens a service station at Rock Island's 17th Street and 6th Avenue, named Valley Oil Co.

1945 – Company expands into sewer and water construction.

1961 – Valley purchases new property on Rock Island's 34th Avenue for its new office, garage and yard.

1965 – Arthur Hass' sons – John, Jim and Bill – take over ownership and operation of the company – leading it for nearly 50 years.

1970 – Company purchases Timberline Construction Co. and enters the earth moving market.

1976 – The Hass family launches Centennial Equipment, a John Deere dealership.

1984 – Valley purchases Central Engineering, adding asphalt paving to its offerings.

1984 – Valley Construction moves to new offices at 3610 78th Ave., Rock Island, where it continues to operate.

1993 – Greg Hass joins the family business full time as equipment manager. An employee since junior high when he pushed a broom and “got greasy and dirty” in the shop, Greg Haa succeeds his father as president and CEO in 2012.

1990s – Company begins doing commercial building construction and leading the construction management on other projects.

2009 – John, Jim and Bill Hass are inducted into the Quad Cities Business Hall of Fame.

2012 – Company ownership and operation transitions to the third generation of Hass family. The company, today, is owned by the third generation of the family including Greg Hass, president and CEO; Adam Hass, his cousin; and Jim and Bill Hass, his uncles (his father John Hass is deceased).

2023 – In May, Valley Commercial Construction became a standalone, affiliated entity of Valley Construction Co. It had been a division of the company.

Source: Valley Construction