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BY DESIGN

## Bolton & Menk Celebrates Fifty Years



In 1949, John Bolton and Martin Menk began a surveying business in Saint Peter, Minnesota with little more than expertise, persistence, and an unwavering commitment to clients. Today, in conversation with Bolton & Menk's president, Jon Rippke, those same elements emerge as core values of the company.

"Our primary goal is to provide solid service to customers," explains Rippke. "It's important that we aggressively study trends and new technologies, but those make sense to us as a company only if they help create solutions for clients. We're problem solvers. That's our point of pride. Whether we design a functional water system or an aesthetically-pleasing facility, maintain good communications with clients, or see a project finished within budget, we take pride in our work. But the primary value of the accomplishment lies in the fact that we have met or exceeded our client's needs."

This attitude took root in Bolton & Menk's early days, when John Bolton and Martin Menk set up shop in a 12' x 20' building that could be sold as a single-car garage if the business failed. They bought equipment on credit, and have said that their gross income could not have been more than two thousand dollars the first six months. "We had very little business to do at first," recalls Menk. "Every night we'd go to the office and talk...We'd talk strategy, who we would see, how we would find new clients, and we'd observe what other consultants were doing. We could see what some of their shortcomings were and we resolved not to make the same mistakes." The two decided that close client relationships and personal attention were important, and through the years, business has been conducted with a strong commitment to client satisfaction.

This attitude of service prompted expansion of the company in the early 1960's. Bolton and Menk wanted to better meet the needs of regional clients, and decided to

purchase a small company in Blue Earth. The Blue Earth office was later moved to Fairmont. In the process, they obtained the services of a young engineer by the name of Bill Sayre, who became important to the company's growth. "Our personnel is vital to our success," stresses Martin Menk. "Without good people we wouldn't have grown at all." Expansion continued in the 1980s as Bolton & Menk grew to include offices in Sleepy Eye and Burnsville, Minnesota and Ames, Iowa. The 1990s have included expansion in Willmar, Minnesota and Liberty, Missouri.

The skill and contributions of Bolton & Menk's people remain a focus. "I most look forward to a series of gatherings we have planned for employees this year," says Rippke. "It will be good to spend time together, to talk about our ideals and how the firm was established. It's important that we all understand what we're about and feel part of the larger group."

Rippke believes that, in addition to the company's attitude of service and the contributions of skilled people, a primary reason that Bolton & Menk has experienced long-term success is the company's ability to adapt. Services have expanded through the years in response to client need and new priorities. With society's greater emphasis on water quality, wastewater and water treatment facilities must meet higher standards. Establishment of an Environmental Engineering Division at Bolton & Menk signaled to clients the importance of this work. Staff members are constantly updated on the latest technology. Rippke foresees that Bolton & Menk's adaptability will continue to be a strength as new technologies and needs emerge.

"Fifty years is a long time," smiles Rippke. "The company's longevity says something important about the philosophies of the people who started it, and the anniversary is certainly a milestone we look forward to celebrating."



# Simpler Times: Designing for the Future

Harry S. Truman was president...The baby boom and subsequent housing boom was in full swing...The Korean War had just begun...Dick and Mac McDonald opened their first fast-food restaurant in San Bernardino, California...Movies such as "A Street Car Named Desire" were playing...and television was in its infancy with Ozzie & Harriet and Lucille Ball & Desi Arnaz.

Bolton & Menk was a partnership of two men — John Bolton and Martin Menk. They began with a twelve by twenty foot office and survey equipment bought on credit. They surveyed and gathered data during the day and drafted (by hand) during the evenings. Their first equipment consisted of slide rules, logarithm tables, conventional levels and transits, chains to measure distances, pencil and paper with T-squares and triangles for drafting.

When they weren't talking strategy, designing projects, drafting or surveying, they attended City Council meetings.

Martin Menk, co-founder of the firm, recalls one of his first clients. "Vernon Center was one of our first clients and we attended their Council meetings every month. Sometimes those meetings would last late into the evening. Often times you would go have coffee or a beer afterwards and I wouldn't get home until almost midnight. At one of the Council meetings, the mayor of Vernon Center knew that I had just gotten married and my bride, Carol, was out in the car waiting for me. That evening he put me first on the agenda and I was out of there in fifteen minutes. The mayor then said, 'Now explain to your new bride where you have been on those nights until midnight!'

"In those early years," Menk reminisced, "you knew all the staff and Council members and were good friends with them. On occasion, cities would hold their meetings around the kitchen table at a council member's or clerk's home, especially during the winter when the city hall wasn't heated."



*Martin Menk poses in front of Bolton & Menk's first office.*

The firm was built on careful early planning and valued service, getting its start working with many smaller communities in southern Minnesota. John Bolton and Martin Menk determined that a concern for clients' best interests and attention to detail were the cornerstones of client satisfaction. This philosophy has carried through fifty years of service and is still true today.

John Bolton retired in 1965 to pursue his varied outside interests until he

passed away in 1990. Martin Menk, whose strong leadership and vision continues to influence the company, was with the firm until his retirement in 1992. He and his wife, Carol, live in Saint Peter.

Today, Bolton & Menk, Inc. has grown to a firm of over 130 employees, with offices in Mankato, Fairmont, Sleepy Eye, Burnsville, and Willmar, Minnesota; Ames, Iowa; and Liberty, Missouri.

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# Innovative Water Treatment Plant in Madison, Minnesota Receives Grand Award

*The Engineering Excellence Award program was initiated by the American Consulting Engineer Council (ACEC) to increase the public's awareness of what engineers really do. The Engineering Excellence Award Program is an annual design competition that recognizes engineering achievements which demonstrate the highest degree of merit, ingenuity and excellence. The top entries from the State of Minnesota become a part of the ACEC National Engineering Excellence Awards program in Washington, D.C. and compete with project winners from other states for the National Grand Conceptor Award. The Madison Water Treatment Plant received a Minnesota Grand Award and will be honored at an awards banquet in February.*



*A new water treatment plant in Madison, Minnesota uses an innovative reverse osmosis system.*

Madison, Minnesota has turned a liability into an asset with an innovative water treatment plant that overcomes the stigma and environmental hazards of the area's poor-quality ground water. A \$1.6 million filtration plant, which went online in July of 1998, is the first municipal water treatment facility in the State of Minnesota to use reverse osmosis technology. In the new plant, two major processes — reverse osmosis membrane treatment and a traditional iron/manganese sand filtration system — were joined to produce the level of water quality the City desired.

Harold Hoxdge, Madison's Water and Wastewater Superintendent for twenty years, says the project was one that had been discussed for some time. "Our old plant was a lime/soda ash system that was in need of major repairs. It was labor-intensive to operate and we needed both

better final water quality and less by-product."

Because the City of Madison had limited resources, the solution to its water treatment problems had to be both cost-effective and efficient to operate. Bolton & Menk, working with the City's engineer, Rodeberg & Berryman, Inc., proposed a reverse osmosis system that was tested as a pilot plant in 1996. The quality of the treated water and the ease of operation convinced the City of Madison to proceed and construction of the new plant began in August, 1997.

"The new system is a good long-term solution," explains Hodge. "We'll be able to adjust or change the system's membrane filter as necessary to meet any standard through the years."

Daniel Elwood, City Administrator for Madison, says he would readily take on

the project again. "Bolton & Menk capably handled the project and offered the range of expertise we needed. The public has responded well to the project, in part because we held public meetings and an open house so people would understand what was happening. I would do it all over again, and change very little about the way we proceeded."

Mr. Elwood does recommend that a city facing a project like this one should proceed expeditiously. "The need for a new treatment plant in Madison was discussed for some time before a decision was made to proceed. In our experience, this caused a few complications. I highly recommend that if a city is considering a project like this, they study the situation, understand their needs, make a decision, and take action. Things definitely do not become less expensive as time passes."

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