

"If you build it, they will come," goes the famous line from the 1989 movie *Field of Dreams*.

That line also might apply to Birmingham. The city is a regional center for the engineering profession, with numerous high-tech enterprises making it a field of dreams for skilled engineers. Demand is heavy for both seasoned engineers and new graduates, allowing engineering firms to flourish in the city. The UAB School of Business has contributed to the growth by allowing many engineers to obtain graduate degrees in the MBA program.

### Building a Tradition

One example of a hometown engineering company that now does business all over the world is BE&K, named the city's top engineering firm for 2004 by the *Birmingham Business Journal*. With 10,000 employees and 2003 revenues of \$1.1 billion, BE&K was number 249 on *Forbes* magazine's 2003 listings of the largest private companies in the United States.

BE&K designs, builds, and maintains many large projects around the country, including sports stadiums, pulp-and-paper plants, and industrial parks. The company also provides engineering expertise for other firms; for example, BE&K designed Honda's Lincoln, Alabama, plant in a joint venture with a Canadian firm, but others handled the construction.

Mike Goodrich, CEO of BE&K, says Birmingham has a history of engineering excellence. "After World War II, there was a lot of construction going on in the South, and many local men who had served in the war started engineering and construction companies," Goodrich says. "Besides these start-up companies, northern firms began locating here. One example was Rust Engineering, which expanded its Birmingham office in the 1950s.

"Along with the growth of the construction industry, there was a concentration of engineers in Birmingham because of the steel industry and companies such as Southern Company Services and BellSouth, which located here."

### Talent on Tap

Another factor was the production of graduate engineers by such schools as UAB, Auburn University, the University of Alabama, Tuskegee University, and others. "The main growth engine for any engineering company is access to well-trained, well-educated people," Goodrich says. "Area schools certainly provide us with a good supply of talent."

The UAB School of Business has been a strong source of talent. BE&K has hired a number of UAB business graduates, including Don Chastain (control engineer), Milton Davis (manager of business development), James Early (leader of procurement, materials handling), Barry Goodwin (manager of scheduling), Alesia Jones (compensation and planning manager), Merriam Mulroy (cost accountant), Brady Parks (graphics project coordinator), Philip Townsend (estimator), Thomas Wilder (human resources manager), and Layla Winkler (tax accountant).



Mike Goodrich and Uday Bhate have seen Birmingham evolve into a regional engineering center.

specializes in geotechnical engineering. "All our work is below ground," says Uday Bhate (MBA, 1977), the firm's CEO. "The strength of a building's foundation may depend on the work we do."

Bhate says the Birmingham area, with its complex geological formations, provides plenty of opportunities for his specialty. "Such conditions as underground mines, sloping rock beds, and sinkholes pose potential problems for engineers to solve," he says. His staff of 65 employees has worked on such projects as the Birmingham-Jefferson Convention Complex, SouthTrust Tower, and UAB's new University Hospital.

After 25 years, Bhate is pleased with his decision to develop an engineering firm in Birmingham. "The work ethic of the people here is great," he says. "Birmingham is a good place to do business, to live, and to raise a family."

## Success by Design

Innovative Minds Build Solid Infrastructure

BY SANDRA BEARDEN

### Of the Earth

Some of Birmingham's engineering firms fill special niches. One is Bhate Engineering, which