

# Alumni Focus

BY ROGER SHULER

## Uday Bhate

### ENGINEERING EXCELLENCE

When most people look at the Birmingham skyline, they probably notice the design and height of the buildings. Uday Bhate (MBA, 1977) tends to think about the foundations.

That's because Bhate, who earned his MBA from the UAB School of Business in 1977, is CEO of Bhate Engineering Corporation. His company performed the geotechnical engineering work for many of Birmingham's most prominent buildings, including SouthTrust Tower, AmSouth-Harbert Plaza, the Birmingham-Jefferson Civic Center, and Alabama Power's headquarters. The firm also

Bhate's firm generally works on the front end of a project. "If a 20-story building is being constructed, we will do an evaluation of the site," Bhate says. "We'll do soil boring and rock coring, and we will analyze conditions in the subsurface to provide recommendations for site grading.

"We make judgments, based on a small number of borings, as to what will happen on the overall site. If the analysis is off the mark, it can cost the project a lot of money."

Soil conditions, groundwater, and environmental contamination are just some of the issues Bhate's teams confront.

UAB's new University Hospital project poses some unusual challenges. "It

includes a very large excavation in the middle of a hospital campus, and we are digging and blasting while we have sensitive equipment in adjacent buildings."

Bhate grew up near Bombay, India, and earned his undergraduate degree in geological sciences from the University of Bombay. He came to the United States in 1969 and earned a master's degree at Georgia Tech. He co-founded an Atlanta engineering firm, Federer, Bhate &

Associates, and then opened a branch of the company in Birmingham.

Shortly after moving to Birmingham, Bhate decided to pursue an MBA through the School of Business at UAB. "Engineering schools don't teach much about business, so I figured I could either learn by experience or I could enhance my knowledge by going to business school.

"The School of Business had an evening MBA program that was very convenient for me," he says. "The experience gave me a much better understanding of subjects like finance and

marketing, which I would otherwise have had to learn by trial and error."

In 1979, Bhate split from his partner and developed Bhate Engineering in Birmingham. He went on to develop an environmental component of the business, which became a separate company. He sold his interest in Bhate Environmental last year.

"The UAB MBA Program helped me gain a better understanding of business, develop confidence, and extend my reach," Bhate says. "It allowed me to take calculated business risks and achieve far more than I thought possible."

Now, Bhate Engineering has about 65 employees. "I tell our employees that we earn our wings every day," he says. "A lot of our work is from repeat clients, and that is very gratifying."

## Tommie Cummings

### ACCOUNTING FOR SUCCESS

Tommie Cummings (AC, 1975) was introduced to the world of business early in life. Her father owned a contracting business, specializing in roofing and home remodeling. Starting when she was three years old, Cummings often would go to work with him.

"The part I remember the most is driving around with him to check on crews at the different job sites," Cummings says. "He would order roofing materials and talk to contractors about what was new in the field. And he would give bids to both residential and commercial customers.

"Probably the most fun for me, as a child, was when the roofing material came in to the warehouse," she recalls. "It would come out of the trailer on a conveyor system, and then it was stacked in the warehouse by size, color, and type. I was just fascinated by that process."

For Cummings, a childlike fascination with business has grown into a satisfying career. She earned a bachelor's degree in accounting at the UAB School of Business in 1975 and landed a position as staff accountant for the international accounting firm of Ernst & Young. Now she is a partner in the



Uday Bhate and Dean Robert E. Holmes

has a strong presence at UAB, handling the geotech work on a number of projects, including Campbell Hall, Bartow Arena, the Beville Biomedical Research Building, The Kirklin Clinic, and the UAB North Pavilion, which is currently under construction.

"The work we do is highly technical, and it's challenging because we're trying to solve problems that are unseen, working below ground," Bhate says. "Birmingham is one of the most complex geological areas you will find anywhere, and that makes our work very interesting."