



Cleanup of the site on which the new Worcester Trial Court now sits is one of the latest feathers in the cap of OTO; the firm focuses not only on large, high-profile commercial, industrial and governmental projects but smaller jobs too.

Right place, right time

Full-service firm is tapped to play a lead role on such key projects as Worcester Trial Court, Worcester State Hospital and Bay State Commons

BY ROD LEE

Who are you going to call? Increasingly, when it comes to environmental engineering/geotechnical projects, it's O'Reilly, Talbot & Okun (OTO), an award-winning company that has been involved in such high-profile builds as the new Worcester Trial Court, the new Worcester State Hospital and the new Bay State Commons.

OTO's success can be attributed to the 32 "real talented people" the firm employs in three locations in Massachusetts and Connecticut (including downtown Westborough), according to James D. Okun, a principal owner.

Three members of this steadily growing team—Okun and fellow partners Kevin O'Reilly and Michael Talbot—got to know each other while working for GZA (a big regional outfit) in Norwood years ago. Okun is an environmental scientist. O'Reilly and Talbot are engineers.

They launched OTO in 1994. "We started off like a lot of small businesses, with (work on the site of) a big department store in Springfield that was going out of business. We got our first copy machine then and are still using it today," Okun says.

ALSO, OTO immediately saw that Western Massachusetts was "underserved." Headquartering the operation in Springfield, where they would face "less competition," made sense to the partners, he notes.

The timing was good in other regards too. The state Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) had just implemented a plan specifying "how cleanups of oil and chemicals were to be done:" a per-

fect foundation from which OTO could spring since "probably two-thirds of our work" (reclaiming properties that may have been contaminated, and using materials in an environmentally friendly way) was to be performed along those lines, Okun says.

OTO was "in the right place at the right time."

Then came another stroke of fortune for OTO: GZA was helping in the cleanup of a Monsanto chemical plant in Everett—"one of the largest on the East Coast, and I was GZA's lead guy there. (OTO) had been in business for six months to a year when Monsanto called and asked if we could take over. I said, 'gee, isn't GZA doing this?'" Monsanto wanted OTO, which it thought fit the bill better. "This was an 80-acre property where the Mystic and Malden rivers come together. The building had to be torn down and a cleanup done. We were part of a team" that cleared the site to make way for creation of a shopping center on the premises; the project took three to four years to complete, Okun says.

"There was soil and some groundwater contamination, very sensitive in that it was near rivers, and very challenging. It was a learning experience for Monsanto, and a great success" for OTO, Okun says.

OTO worked with another engineering firm on Bay State Commons, a mixed-use development in Westborough.

THE WORCESTER Trial Court "was a real big one for us," Okun says. "The Gilman Building needed to be demolished before the courthouse could go up. DCAM (the Commonwealth's Division of Capital Asset Management) wanted to save some historical elements...our job was making sure the demolition didn't further con-

taminate the site, and to remove waste, like asbestos, transformers, ballasts. Once the site was cleared, earth work could begin.”

Okun says OTO treated and removed “35,000-40,000 cubic yards of soil, most of which could be recycled, and we arranged for it to be reused at other locations. The Gilman Building had seen different uses, including manufacturing, and there were solvents, oil and metal waste. Some of it was stuck there. Where we couldn’t get to it, we designed a barrier under the (new) building to prevent the possibility of any chemicals seeping in.”

At Worcester State Hospital, “we worked with DCAM again” on a BUD, or Beneficial Use Demonstration, project, which had a “strong green philosophy,” Okun says. “The state told us it was one of the best building proposals they’d seen. We are one of the few firms that bring together under one roof all these skills...testing, interpretation (risk assessment), monitoring construction work, etc. The demolition phase of the project at Worcester State Hospital is almost done. Work there will be

wrapped up in the next couple of months.”

All of these projects OTO has tackled came with significant environmental challenges. So have others. Development plans for a one-of-a-kind children’s picture-book museum in Amherst, for instance, had the structure placed in a scenic apple orchard overlooking the hills and valleys of the picturesque New England town. But the historic use of toxic pesticides had left potentially dangerous residues in the soils in the area. Okun met with representatives as well as state and town officials to develop a risk-based cleanup plan that limited future risks on and off the property.

Development

With services that include Regulatory Compliance, Environmental Assessment, Risk Assessment, Geotechnical Engineering, Industrial Hygiene, Asbestos Management, Indoor Air Quality, Data Validation and Brownfield Remediation, OTO is “still a small business, but growing...and relationships are important,” Okun says.



O’Reilly, Talbot and Okun (OTO) staff includes, from the left, James D. Okun, LSP, managing principal, Jill E. Naugle, risk assessor, Debra M. Listernick, associate and senior risk assessor, and Bruce H. Nickelsen, LSP, LEP, associate.