

2/14/06

Antinozzi scores successes during 50th anniversary

ROB VARNON rvarnon@ctpost.com
Connecticut Post

STRATFORD — In its 50th year, architectural firm Antinozzi Associates is winning state and private contracts in a market one expert describes as challenging for architects hoping for new buildings.

"I'm feeling very confident and looking forward to the next 50 years," Paul Antinozzi, the firm's president, said Monday.

Antinozzi said experience and repeat business has helped his firm grow to a 35-person staff over the years.

In particular, Antinozzi has won contracts with Webster Bank to design new branches in four states and continues to work with Unilever in Trumbull as that company expands its facilities. Antinozzi is working on its fourth contract at the Trumbull campus.

But there are other projects on the way, including a new aircraft maintenance school at Hartford's Brainard Airport. The state Department of Education will operate the school, which is for high school graduates.

The Brainard school is an \$8 million project and will include a 14,000-square-foot hangar and other buildings where future aircraft mechanics will be trained, Antinozzi said. The entire school will be about 40,000 square feet, according to the firm.

Antinozzi has also won two contracts to renovate technical high schools in Hamden and Manchester. The two renovation projects are expected to cost \$97 million.

But perhaps more exciting than these projects are designs the firm plans to unveil for two downtown high-rise Bridgeport apartment buildings this year.

Any building over 10 stories is generally considered a high rise.

While Antinozzi didn't provide any further details on the two buildings, the Connecticut Post reported in December that Urban Green Developers and Lynmark Group, both of New York, are planning to build apartment buildings of 14 and 15 stories respectively in the downtown.

Antinozzi said he expects to file paperwork with the city's zoning commission within a few months.

Despite Antinozzi's success, "I wouldn't want to be an architect in Connecticut," said Bruce Wettenstein of the Westport-based commercial real estate firm Vidal/Wettenstein LLC.

Wettenstein said he is glad Antinozzi is getting so much business because he imagines Connecticut is a difficult place to find work.

According to Wettenstein, the majority of architectural work in the state has been in the government sector, especially school projects, as other sectors have not expanded much over the last few years.

A large reason for that is the state's failure to attract new business, he said.

The greater Bridgeport area is a perfect example of the problem. Wettenstein said there is much interest in properties in this region, but most of that is coming from companies leaving other Connecticut communities, such as Stamford or Norwalk.

That doesn't create much demand for new buildings, according to Wettenstein, because there are enough vacant ones for companies to take over.

Of the more than 15 transactions Wettenstein said he is working on, only one is new construction.

Ultimately, Wettenstein said, he thinks the Connecticut architects who are doing well are established firms that have strong repeat business and name recognition, like Antinozzi and Shelton-based Fletcher Thompson.

