

## LaBella readies for transition to new leadership team

By KEVIN OKLOBZIJA

The management baton is about to be passed to the next generation of leaders at LaBella Associates.

Steve Metzger will succeed Sergio Esteban as CEO, Jeff Roloson will take over from Robert Healy as president and Mike Winderl slides into Metzger's current role of chief operating officer, effective Jan. 1. Rob Pepe will remain chief financial officer.

It's all part of a planned leadership transition that has been four years in the making at one of Rochester's leading multi-discipline design firms.

"This is a joyous time for us, to undergo a leadership transition from a position of strength and a position of success," Healy said. "It allows for new energy and new goals."

Esteban and Healy aren't leaving, however. They'll become principals at the firm and maintain their current board positions, Esteban as chairman and Healy as treasurer. They will also continue to support client relationships, business development and community relations.

Metzger, a civil engineer, has been with LaBella since 1994. He was named director of civil engineering in 2010 and promoted to COO in November 2017.

"While no one can step into Sergio's shoes and lead exactly as he does, I share his deep commitment to our company's values and I'm grateful for the opportunity to lead LaBella and represent our company in this community."

Roloson is currently the firm's director of architecture and has served on the board of directors since 2013. He joined the firm in 2005 and worked extensively on municipal and community projects.

Winderl, an engineer, is currently LaBella's director of buildings engineering team, which includes structural, mechanical, electrical, energy, plumbing and hydropower services. He was hired in 2009 and has been on the board since 2012.

"Mike, Steve and Jeff have all run significant divisions within the company," Healy said. "The disciplines they've directed account for 60 percent of our net revenue. They're prepared to lead and bring new energy and new ideas."

The succession plan was drawn up in 2015, when the firm's leaders devised their five-year plan for achievement,



Photo provided by LaBella Associates

The LaBella Associates leadership team, effective Jan. 1: Rob Pepe, chief financial officer; Jeff Roloson, president; Steve Metzger, chief executive officer; and Mike Winderl, chief operating officer.

advancement and growth. Preparing the next generation of leaders from within—be it for a discipline within the firm, or for a spot at the top of the LaBella food chain—is one of the firm's core values.

"That level of empowerment is extremely powerful and exciting to employees, to be able to feel ownership and authorship of a project," Roloson said. "There's a certain reward you get from feeling in charge."

LaBella has nearly tripled in size since 2013, employing right around 800 today, 400 of whom work in Rochester. The company climbed 41 spots to No. 145 on the Engineering News-Record 2019 Top 500 list.

The firm's diversity of disciplines, as well as having 21 offices in seven states, has led to stability and steady growth. The leadership, incoming and outgoing, sees no reason that should change.

"This transition is rewarding to see people that you have worked with grow their careers and move up into a position of leadership," Healy said. "That's what this company is all about, empowering our employees to bring their skills to the company and contribute, and they've all been a big part of our success."

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