

A photograph of a middle-aged man with short, light-colored hair, smiling. He is wearing a light-colored, short-sleeved button-down shirt with a small red and blue checkered pattern, tucked into khaki pants with a brown belt. He is standing in front of several tall, green saguaro cacti under a clear blue sky. The background is slightly out of focus.

American
Infrastructure
Is ABC's
Contractor
Of the Year

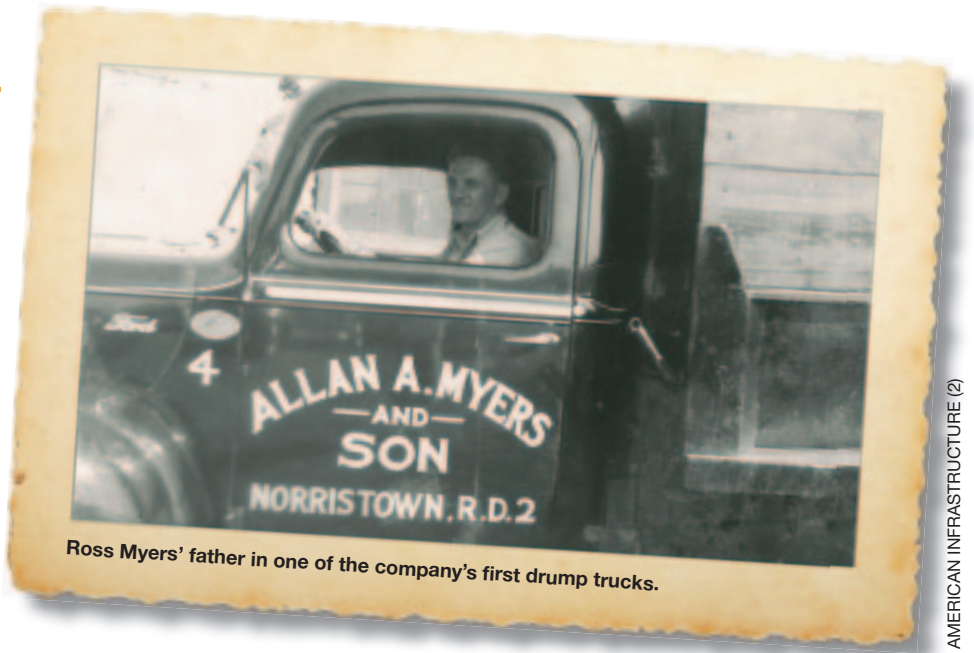
Family-Owned Company

With an Industry-Wide Focus

BY JESSICA PORTER

Ross Myers, CEO of American Infrastructure, accepted ABC's Contractor of the Year award in Phoenix.

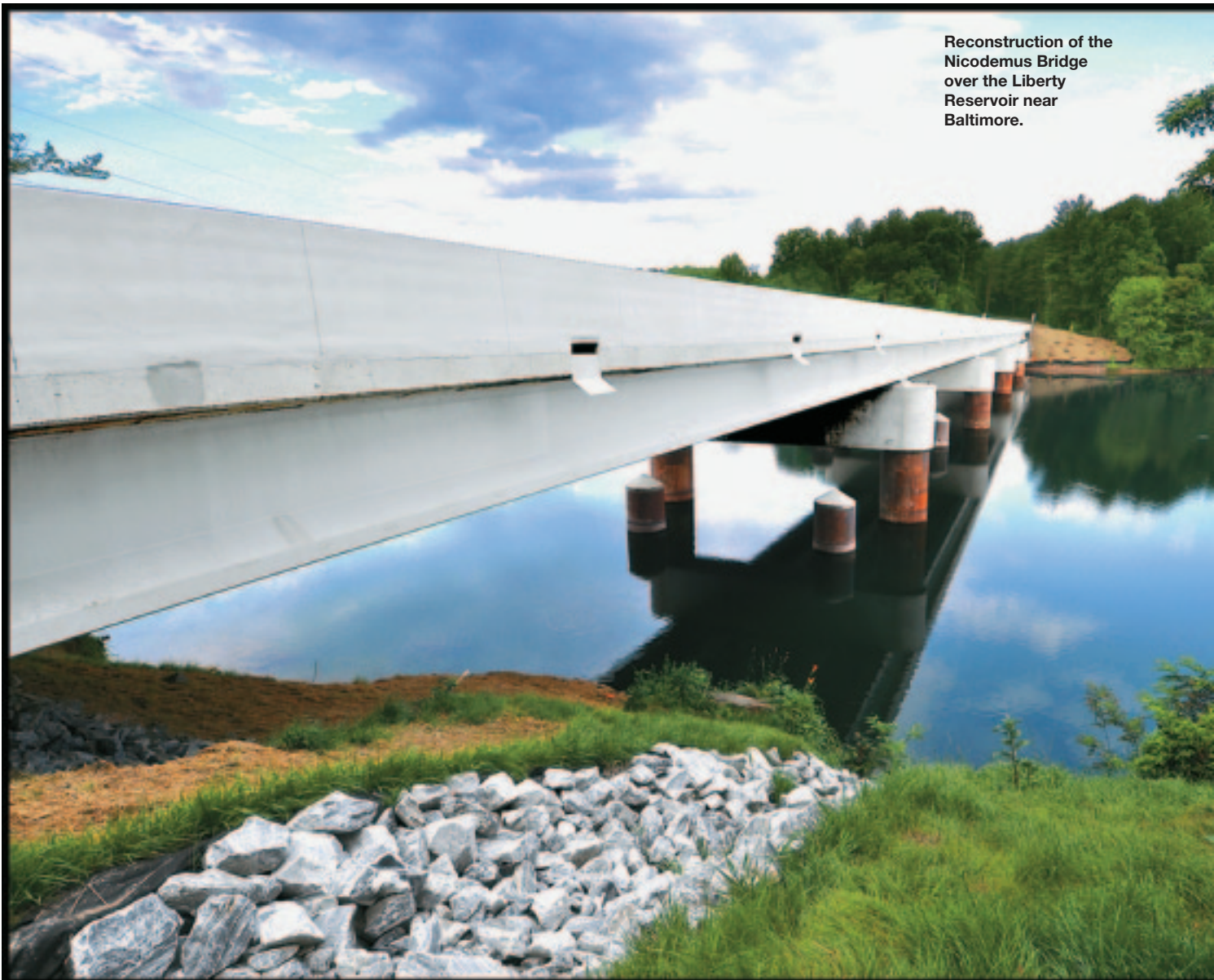
AMERICAN INFRASTRUCTURE, Worcester, Pa., has a three-part vision: compete with the best, fastest and safest companies in the world; build a great place to work that incorporates the values of the merit shop; and leave footprints in the construction industry by becoming a leader. That vision plays out every day in the company's operations—making American Infrastructure a perfect fit to receive Associated Builders and Contractors' (ABC) Contractor of the Year award. >>



Ross Myers' father in one of the company's first drump trucks.

AMERICAN INFRASTRUCTURE (2)

Reconstruction of the Nicodemus Bridge over the Liberty Reservoir near Baltimore.



ANTIQUE PHOTO FRAME: VEER



The company's education and training center in Worcester, Pa.

“The harder we work to make ourselves better and to make ABC stronger, the better we can make the industry,” says CEO Ross Myers. “If we can get better at something and share it with others, the whole industry benefits.”

INSTITUTING TRADITIONAL VALUES

American Infrastructure had a humble beginning in 1939 as a Pennsylvania dairy

farm owned and operated by Myers' father and grandfather. After realizing the farm was not enough to support two families, the men sold six cows to purchase a 1939 Ford dump truck and start a small construction company. Myers' father drove the truck during the day and helped his grandfather with the farm each morning and evening.

Myers' father joined the military and

was sent to Hawaii and the Philippines to build air bases. Upon returning home with new knowledge of construction and equipment, he officially formed Allen A. Myers and Son with Myers' grandfather.

Growing up, Ross Myers had no intention of working in the family business, and instead went to college to be a bridge designer. By graduation, his interest changed from designing bridges to building them, so he joined the family business in 1972.

The company became an ABC member 30 years ago. As one of the few merit shop contractors in the highly unionized Philadelphia area during that time, Myers knew the company needed someone on its team.

“We were growing as a contractor and had competition that didn't want us to grow, but we didn't let that deter us,” he says. “I heard about ABC and knew we needed to support and be part of it.”

During the past three decades, Myers has seen an influx of merit shop contractors and believes ABC has been instrumental in that growth. The company is now a member of seven ABC chapters.

In 1998, American Infrastructure was born. The family decided to continue the Allen A. Myers name in Pennsylvania to



Paving Interstate 95 near Richmond, Va.



This \$210 million reconstruction of U.S. Route 202 in King-of-Prussia, Pa., won the Governor's Award for Safety Excellence.

preserve 75 years of brand recognition, but in Delaware, Maryland and Virginia, the company operates as American Infrastructure.

American Infrastructure is the largest civil contractor in the Mid-Atlantic region, with \$700 million in annual revenues, 1,800 employees and more than 150 projects occurring at any time. In addition to maintaining a presence at the 13 asphalt and stone companies it has acquired, the firm has offices in Alburtis, Pa.; Dover, Del.; Fallston, Md.; and Chantilly, Williamsburg and Richmond, Va. Though projects grow in complexity and size every year, the company's business model focuses on keeping it simple.

"We have four core skills we try to be the best at: excavation, utility, structural concrete and asphalt paving," Myers says. "We keep self-performance as high as possible and then convert it into whatever the market needs."

The model seems to be working. Despite the challenging economy, American Infrastructure's revenues, workforce, geography and acquisitions have continued to grow during the past five years. However, American Infrastructure still feels like a family business. Myers works hard to ensure the values instilled in his grandfather and father as young men trying to survive on a dairy farm are carried into the modern-day company.

"We respect each other, care about each other and look out for each other the same way we did then," he says. "Hard work was a value then and is a value today. People believe in it and are proud of it."

This respect translates into a serious commitment to safety. American Infrastructure is an ABC Safety Training and Evaluation Process Platinum award winner and an ABC Accredited Quality Contractor. Myers instills in all employees that a family exists at work and a family exists at home. The family members at work must respect each other enough to ensure each employee stays safe to return to their family members at home.

"As a leader of the company, it's my responsibility to provide a safe worksite for all employees," he says. "But it's also every employee's obligation to themselves and to their families to make sure they work safely that day and to make sure their crew members get home safely."

PUTTING PEOPLE FIRST

Even with its recent growth, American Infrastructure faces challenges just like any other contractor, specifically with hiring good employees, which Myers says is the real key to success.

American Infrastructure prides itself on hiring friendly and talented people; having a positive attitude is a leading characteristic of a new hire.

"We hire attitude and train skills," Myers says. "We work very hard to find people with a similar value system. We hire people who believe respect for themselves and others is important, hard work is something to be proud of, and looking after customers and partners is a priority."

American Infrastructure recently was ranked as the fourth best privately held company for leadership development by *Chief Executives* magazine and was ranked 29th out of 125 companies for employee development by *Training Magazine* for the fourth consecutive year. This is partly due to the variety of opportunities employees are given to advance their careers. American Infrastructure has a policy of promoting from within the company two out of three times, so maintaining a pipeline of people with leadership skills is critical to filling those openings.

"We do a lot in the leadership area because, at the end of the day, all the important things in life and business take leadership," Myers says.

All employees can earn a Construction Management Certificate from Drexel University in Philadelphia, with tuition and books paid for by American Infrastructure. The firm also maintains continual learning centers in Pennsylvania, Maryland, Delaware and Virginia that provide classes year round, as well as online learning programs and supervisory training.

FAMILY-OWNED COMPANY with an Industry-Wide Focus

American Infrastructure also offers an 18-month program in which 24 select employees from all areas of the company can receive advanced leadership training. These students not only participate in intensive study, but also complete a project of their choice to significantly improve the company.

Though these programs usually are limited to American Infrastructure employees, they sometimes are offered to external partners and subcontractors if their participation benefits a specific project. Myers

believes it is his job to create opportunity for his employees, but it is up to each employee to seize the opportunity to grow professionally.

“I believe every human being wants the same things out of life,” he says. “We all want to provide for ourselves, our families, do something we feel good about and capitalize on opportunity.”

DEVELOPING FUTURE WORKERS

In addition to providing options for employee development, American

Infrastructure is committed to giving back to the community—and the construction industry—by participating in a variety of volunteer and educational programs. For the past five years, American Infrastructure has been part of the ACE Mentor Program of America, which aims to attract young people to the construction industry by helping students focus on opportunities in the areas of science and engineering. Volunteer mentors concentrate on students’ academic, personal and career development. Bob Capps, American Infrastructure’s director of recruiting and career development, was instrumental in bringing the program to the Philadelphia suburbs, where three ACE teams now exist.

American Infrastructure also partners with a number of local schools. At Drexel University, employees mentor students, speak during campus events and classroom programs, and serve as members of the school’s Construction Education Advisory Council. Additionally, the company recently established an endowment program that supports construction career and industry events attended by Drexel students and employees.

The company also provides scholarship, internship and cooperative educational opportunities for Pennsylvania College of Technology students, as well as employment opportunities for graduating seniors. In 2008, the company helped create the Myers-Lawson School of Construction at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, which brings together project designers and builders.

Considering its recent growth and dedication to workforce development, American Infrastructure is creating some pretty big footprints in the construction industry. With diverse clients in the water, wastewater treatment and transportation sectors, as well as energy projects in the Marcellus Shale region, American Infrastructure is ready for whatever challenges and opportunities lie ahead.

“Work is always fun. I love what I do and I love construction, but running an organization is actually a whole lot more challenging than building a bridge,” Myers says. “I get up every morning and look forward to the day.”

**Jessica Porter is staff writer of
Construction Executive.**

