

LAMBDA ALPHA INTERNATIONAL - SIMCOE CHAPTER

PRESIDENT'S AWARD – NOV 29, 2016

ROBERT MCBRIDE P. ENG., MCIP, RPP SENIOR TRANSPORTATION CONSULTANT, BA GROUP

Robert McBride is a valued member of LAI and of the professional transportation-planning cohort in Toronto and region. He is a modest and soft-spoken man with quiet leadership qualities - and a very large sphere of influence. I've witnessed this for many decades, both as a client of BA Group, and as a colleague interested in the big city-building issues of the day.

Robert's currently billed as a Senior Transportation Planning and Engineering Consultant at BA Group, where he has worked since earning a Bachelor of Arts and Science in Systems Design Engineering from the University of Waterloo in 1975.

Nine years later, in 1984, he was Vice President of the growing firm, and became its Chief Executive in 1991, taking the reins over from Ed Levy. Robert held that position for 21 years. Ed says he had his eye on Robert for the leadership position after a very few years of working with him.

By way of background, BA Group professes a very carefully nurtured culture, different from other engineering firms doing similar work. Ed started BA up in Toronto as an offshoot of the Barton Ashman Chicago office. Ed moved here and hired Ralph Bond in 1974, then Robert McBride and Chris Middlebro' the following year.

Ed says they were very carefully chosen, and attributes the firm's enduring success to the fact that they are *not* a big firm, now about 60 staff; and that they haven't succumbed to merger offers to join larger conglomerate firms. It was their decision *not* to join Barton Ashman in just such a merger early on that cemented BA Toronto's full independence - and saw the parent company's eventual demise within three years.

Ed says, "In Toronto, we decided to have a good time, and to take on projects that we loved working on." Having set that tenor and work ethic,

BA maintains a low turnover to this day, and has been characterized by a slow, steady growth.

One of very first things Robert said to Ed shortly after he got the job was that he wanted to travel - and could he take a couple of long leaves of absence to do so? Ed swallowed hard, and decided to walk the walk; and had to justify Robert's time off to their then partners in Chicago – 'You just hired this guy and he wants to take a lot of time off?!?!' But Ed prevailed and Robert travelled – this was before his marriage to Lynn Short and their children. Ed says Robert returned from his travels with a broadened, more worldly perspective, which has served him well to this day.

Robert had a spell in his career where he was sent to Calgary to open a BA office there – which at one point was doing more work than BA in Toronto. But in a few years, Calgary went bust, and the McBrides moved back to Toronto - and as a result had trouble selling their Calgary house.

Starting in the later 1980's, BA began to take on public-sector contracts, where previously they had worked for private-sector clients only. They worked with David Crombie – the then Waterfront czar – and did work for the Waterfront Regeneration Trust. The report that Robert and BA completed with Ken Greenberg for Crombie "is still a great piece of work," says Ed, not that everything in it was embraced.

However, it led to years of public-sector work for Robert and his colleagues on what to do with the Gardiner, the Lower Don, Ataratiri lands, the Unilever site, the ramp systems for the Gardiner, and integrating new high-rise communities on the railway lands in the central and west Waterfront, and countless other studies - among which there was a share of frustration, misery and expense, according to Ed, mixed in with BA's successes and highlights.

John Campbell says, during his recent 12 years as CEO of Waterfront Toronto, Robert McBride was ever-present somewhere in the background, and was one of the few consultants whom he "always regarded their advice as almost neutral to me" - meaning John says, "it was good advice no matter who pays for him."

John says he's not quite certain when Robert was working for Waterfront Toronto or for another developer, but that he valued his opinion on things like the Queen's Quay re-alignment, the Gardiner take-down, the Unilever site, Robert's work with Chris Glaisek, and his multi-disciplinary approach. John said that Robert would help find "the best all-around solution." Looking around many of his peers, John commented, "he's the guy I would trust most."

And John's final comment was, "He reminds me of Ed Levy." High praise indeed!

John Livey at the City of Toronto - from his high-level municipal oversight role - said of Robert that he "respects his opinion and that he was a delight to work with on issues like the Gardiner, reorganizing regional roads, flood protection, Metro limits and more lately on the Unilever site".

Apart from Robert's professional Engineering and Planning designations, he became a Consulting Engineer in 1987, and is named a Fellow of the Institute of Transportation Engineers.

One notable career highlight is that he was the Senior Transportation advisor on the Amman Master Plan team in Jordan, which later received the 2007 World Leadership Award for Town Planning. And it is Robert's rapid transit plan that Amman started building out in 2010.

I remember Robert mentioning that it's a different culture in Amman when he was working on that Plan. On one of his visits with the Amman clients to a road construction project that was well underway, he noticed that an intersection hadn't been built with the necessary turning radius for vehicles. The order was immediately issued to rip up the intersection and build it correctly. Robert said, "They turn on a dime there."

Jeff Evenson, now Director of the Canadian Urban Institute and formerly Central Waterfront Director of the Waterfront Regeneration Trust, said Robert was always willing to take seriously the most innovative ideas that were put forward to help solve "the intractable transportation problems on the waterfront. He would explore monorail, would explore running the Spadina streetcar down to the waterfront and out to the airport. He would explore these and many transportation planning issues with his characteristic social sensitivity and technical expertise."

Robert is a big-picture strategist who understands that the big moves in transportation are inevitably intertwined - in *our* culture - with an array of related land use, planning, fiscal, and political issues, each of which has its own set of problems to unknot in order to find a consensus way forward. He has 40 years of experience solving a myriad of difficult transportation issues at the helm of BA Group, and in his hands-on work that he still loves.

Robert has been:

- Chair of the Greater Toronto Transportation Conference, and President of the Toronto Section of the Institute of Transportation Engineers,
- President of the Simcoe Chapter of LAI;
- First Vice President of LAI and Chair of its Chapter Services Committee, which supports the 25 chapters globally, and counting...
- Plus, shortly after stepping down as BA's CEO and into the BA Senior Consultant role, he helped found a private new-tech company called Spectrum Traffic Data Inc., which is a provider of "premium-quality street traffic data collection and distribution services".

It is my pleasure and great honour to present the President's Award for 2016 to Robert McBride in recognition of an exemplary career among the many exceptional colleagues in Lambda Alpha's Simcoe Chapter and in the greater Toronto region.

Bronwyn Krog, November 29, 2016