

IN DEPTH: ARCHITECTS & ENGINEERS
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Engineering takes a family path for the Frandina clan

Paul Chimera

Philip F. Frandina's late father was a concrete contractor, a fact that seems to have cemented the destiny of the junior Frandina and so many others in his family in the engineering profession.

Engineering is a "problem-solving occupation," said Frandina, 68, patriarch of the family dynasty. There are others in the family who seek civil, mechanical and electrical engineering solutions daily.

Frandina heads Frandina Engineering P.C. at 2351 N. Forest Road, Amherst. He went solo in 1988, after nearly 30 years with the Erie County Department of Public Works and being named one of the top 10 public works officials in the country.

He started as an engineering assistant with the county and rose through the ranks to become superintendent of highways. In 1982, he was appointed commissioner of public works and was responsible for designing, constructing and maintaining hundreds of highway, bridge and building projects.

Earlier posts for the now semi-retired Frandina included jobs with the Buffalo Department of Public Works and teaching assignments at Erie Community College and the University at Buffalo.

Perhaps because of his work, the allure of engineering has spread widely through the Frandina clan. Eldest son, Frank Frandina, is a Vice President-Director at Hatch Mott McDonald Engineers. He is the Manager of Engineering for all of HMM's North American operations. He specializes in major transportation projects such as underground tunnels and urban transportation systems. He holds the rare distinction of scoring a perfect 100% on the New York State Professional Engineers Licensing Exam.

His younger son, Joseph Frandina, is the in-house engineer and director of stadium operations for the Buffalo Bills. He had earlier worked with his father at Frandina Engineering, and togeth-

er designed the luxury suites and club level boxes at Rich Stadium.

The senior Frandina's daughter, Rosanne, was formerly the City's Director of Development and is now sewer plant administrator for the Buffalo Sewer Authority and on maternity leave with her third child and the ninth grandchild for Philip and his wife, Mary Lou, a librarian at Canisius College.

In keeping with the pattern, Rosanne's husband, Jim Van Oss, is a mechanical engineer and supervisor at Moog Inc. aerospace division.

Then there's nephew John Frandina, a mechanical engineer and vice president at E.I. Associates in Buffalo. Another nephew, Steven Leone, makes his living as an electronics engineer in Jacksonville, Fla.

There's also Leonard Falsone, a civil engineer in Houston and a nephew of Frandina's deceased first wife, Josephine.

The senior Frandina's brother, Vincent, is a mechanical engineer, now retired as plant engineer at Erie County Medical Center.

"My father was a concrete contractor, and I grew up around construction-related work," Phil Frandina said. "With that construction background, I decided to go into engineering. I started in night school and had worked with my dad and four brothers in the family concrete business."

He learned the City of Buffalo was looking for people with construction background and technical knowledge to fill an engineering inspector slot. He landed the job. From there he would move to his county public works post, which developed into a 30-year career.

Frandina said he never actively pushed any of his children into the profession but his love of his work inevitably rubbed off on them. He remembers Sunday rides in the country where the kids thought they were out for some rural sightseeing. In fact, dad admits, "I was really looking at some of my jobs."

His career has spanned many significant accomplishments. As commissioner of public works, Frandina proudly recalls his involvement in the simultaneous construction of the Erie County Holding Center downtown and the Erie County Correctional Facility in Alden, both multi-million dollar projects which, from design to completion, had to be squeezed into two years.

"It was a fast-track job, which was finished on time and saved the county quite a large sum in penalties that would have had to be paid to the state had the job not been finished on time. These were the latest, state-of-the-art facilities of this kind," he said.

Another idea credited to Frandina involved combining the county's gas meters downtown into

one big meter on Upper Terrace behind the jail. Before that energy-conserving effort, none of the individual meters used enough gas to qualify as a large user. But when combined into one, the large user category was met resulting in a considerable rate reduction.

Most of his efforts, however, involved building highways and bridges. The engineer remains project manager for the New York State Bridge Inspection Program in four Western New York counties.

Frandina said he couldn't be more proud of his engineering family, and credits his first wife, Josephine who died of ovarian cancer, with being an "old-fashioned mother who was really responsible for their upbringing."

In his semi-retirement, he now finds himself increasingly involved as an expert witness in construction litigation and accident reconstruction cases.

His background in physics is critical when he needs to help determine how fast vehicles involved in an accident were traveling at a certain point in time.

His knowledge of the construction industry helps in arbitration, which he said is an expedient way to resolve construction disputes, "because juries usually don't understand the terminology and processes involved."

Frandina relaxes by painting in oils. His subject matter? Bridges and buildings.

And, weather permitting, he and his grandchildren sit by his backyard, 8-by-16 foot concrete fish pond where he raises Japanese fish called koi and enjoys membership in the Niagara Frontier Pond and Koi Club.

What's more, the list of his professional affiliations, past and present, and his activities with cultural and civic groups, could, well, span a very large bridge.

"I've always tried to keep busy," he said. "And my family relationships are very important to me. We try to keep the family together through annual get-togethers with all the brothers and sisters, so that all the cousins will get to know each other."

And, he adds about these family reunions, a conscious effort is made not to talk about engineering.

Paul Chimera is a free-lance journalist based in Williamsville.

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