

Continuing to build his family's legacy

ROBB TEER

President, Durham's Teer Associates

By Amanda Jones

DURHAM – At least three times a week, Robb Teer makes rounds at the Radisson Hotel's restaurant – a longtime gathering spot of corporate and political leaders.

From table to table he goes, greeting friends, associates and new acquaintances alike.

As heir to his family's business connections, Teer is familiar with the Radisson, formerly known as the Radisson Governor's Inn. It was built by his ancestors' company, as was the Blue Cross and Blue Shield headquarters in Chapel Hill and sections of the Blue Ridge Parkway in the mountains.

Those projects were in place before Teer launched his own company, Teer Associates, which has gone on to make its own mark.

It's no surprise to those who understand that the Teer name is synonymous with building in Durham and RTP that the license plate on

Robb Teer's Jeep Grand Cherokee reads, "RTP-NC."

"My whole life has been about economic development," he says. Among major projects landed under Teer's watch as leader of the Teer construction family have been a four-building office complex for IBM and a drug-making complex for Biogen that's grown in steps to 791,000 square feet.

"He was essential in getting us connected and up and operating," John Ward, Biogen's vice president of global engineering, says of Teer and his company. "We were happy enough to come back to him several times."

Among current projects being handled by Teer Associates is a new headquarters for the Sigma Xi science and engineering honor society in RTP. "I had gotten to know Robb when he was managing the building we are currently in now and came to really trust him," says Patrick Sculley, executive director of Sigma Xi.

"Whenever I called him about an issue, he was always candid with me," Sculley says.

Teer also is working with Inspire Pharmaceuticals to plan an 80,000-square-foot research facility, though no construction schedule has been established.

And he was a force behind the sale of the 340,000-square-foot former Mitsubishi semiconductor plant in north Durham to KBI BioPharma of Atlanta. KBI expects to employ about 250 people within three years and 550 within five.

ROBERT DILLARD TEER JR.

Age: 58

Company: Teer Associates

Employees: 10

Hometown: Durham

Hobbies: Spending time with grandchild, duck hunting and bass fishing

Education: Graduate of Durham High School, 1963; business degree from East Carolina

University in 1967 and winner of the Fieldcrest Award given annually to the School of Business senior with the highest grade point average.

Family: Wife of 39 years, Susan; daughter and son-in-law, Kristin and Dan Baruffo; granddaughter, Tatum, 3.

Teer says his life has been about economic development.

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TEER: As a young boy, he went with his father to company's work sites

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To make the deal work, Teer invested some of his own money in KBI. "I feel positive about their being a success," he says. It was the first time he has invested his own money in a company to help lure it to the Triangle.

"One of our goals when we bought the site was to replace the jobs that Mitsubishi once had - about 500," he says. "This (KBI) was a startup seeking equity. So, we struck a deal that if they would buy the facility, we would invest in them."

KBI bought the buildings and 34 acres from Teer for \$15.5 million and plans to invest \$65 million in the facility over the next five years. Teer would not disclose the amount he invested in KBI.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PRIORITY

On the economic development sideline, Teer is treasurer of the Raleigh-Durham Airport Authority and was appointed by Gov. Mike Easley earlier this year to serve on the state's new nine-member Turnpike Authority.

Doug Byrd, community relations manager for the North Carolina Department of Commerce, attended East Carolina University with Teer in the early 1960s and has remained a friend.

"I think Robb looks at things like if the state and the region looks good, then he'll eventually get his part," Byrd says. "He puts the region first before he puts Robb Teer."

Teer also takes seriously his role in maintaining the reputation of his family's name in business circles.

His grandfather, the late Nello L. Teer

Sr., started a Durham-based construction company in 1909 that grew into one of the 100 largest contractors in the United States. His father, Dillard, and his uncle, Nello Teer Jr., worked with the company most of their adult lives before selling it to Koppers Co. of Pennsylvania in 1980.

Teer, 58, says he remembers traveling to work sites around the country with his father when he was a boy. While in college, he'd work at Durham and Southern Railroad, which the Teer family had bought in 1954, as a clerk, flag man, break man, conductor ... "anything they let me do," he says.

The military draft during the Vietnam War delayed his full entry into business. Teer was assigned to an Army medical service unit in Durham and later to a logistics support group in Garner, where he was promoted to lieutenant colonel before he left the service.

He never went to war, but he did travel for advanced military training, including studies at Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, Kan. "It was a great part of my life," Teer says. "I would do it all over again."

A NEW TEER COMPANY

After the Nello L. Teer Co. was sold, the family kept the company's real estate development division, Teer Enterprises. When his Army duties were complete, Teer headed back home to work in that business - first taking a job as property manager of the company's headquarters in the Trust Building in downtown Durham.

Teer Enterprises was dissolved in 1985 with the sale of its main asset, the Park

Center office campus. Robb Teer in 1986 established Teer Associates.

"It's been an easy transition through different stages of my career," Teer says. "My granddaddy recognized early on that the difference between us and our competitors was relationships and service. We've kept that."

In 2001, Teer published a book called "Courage Ever," which chronicles the successes of his grandfather's company. He also commissioned a "Wall of History" in the company conference room detailing the history of the Teer businesses.

He hopes to keep the family chain unbroken.

His son-in-law, Dan Barutio, is Teer Associates' lead developer and broker and is in line to one day head the company. Teer's chief financial officer, Marcia Gooch, is the other half of the Teer Associates team that he hopes will carry on following his retirement.

But Teer probably will never truly leave the business, admitting he still feels a sense of ownership in every building he's ever built, managed or owed.

"Most of our work has been within three miles of the (Radisson) Governor's Inn," he says. "I've never been one to want to travel far."

And he still doesn't go very far - his beach home in Myrtle Beach among his few trips. His only daughter and granddaughter live only a couple of miles away from his Durham home. And most of the 25 members of the Teer family - counting aunts, uncles and cousins - live in Durham and gather for birthdays, holidays and special occasions.

"It's quite an event," he says.