



INDUSTRY ROUNDTABLE

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On the fast track to success

COMPANIES CONCERNED ABOUT GOVERNMENT INCENTIVES AND ECONOMY



JIM COURTNEY

CEOs met Sept. 15 at the offices of Hodgson Russ LLP to discuss current and future challenges. They operate Fast Track Companies, which were reviewed by The Bonadio Group and appeared on the 2016 Business First list.

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Some of the fastest-growing companies in Western New York expect stable growth ahead, but others are bracing for economic headwinds.

Tom McManus, CEO of KegWorks, worries that a downturn will slow the growth of his 18-year-old business. KegWorks sells beer supplies, dispensing equipment and other beverage products online and at a retail store on Military Road in Kenmore. The company is a subsidiary of Dot Com Holdings of Buffalo Inc., whose revenue rose 6.9 percent in 2015.

"Our business on the consumer side is really tied to disposable income, and if the economy burps, our products are probably the first thing to go," McManus said. "On our commercial side, we're tied to hospitality construction. Once again, if the economy burps ... the first thing that stops is hospitality construction."

He and eight other leaders of some of the region's fastest-growing firms participated in Business First's Sept. 15 roundtable, sponsored by Hodgson Russ LLP. The conversation ranged from challenges in business to generational differences in the workforce to the economic redevelopment taking shape

in the area.

Some criticized state incentives that attract out-of-town companies, saying more should be offered to those already here. Others took issue with special attention given to one industry over another.

Joy Kuebler of Joy Kuebler Landscape Architect PC started the firm 13 years ago. It debuted at No. 16 on Business First's 2016 Fast Track Companies list.

"I think my frustration has more come from the attention that's been given to the tech startup and high-tech entrepreneur competitions," she said. "An entrepreneur means any number of things, and to say that

a service-industry entrepreneur does not have access to the same amount of opportunity for funding through those various mechanisms has been very frustrating for me."

Robert Rich III of ROAR Logistics Inc., a transportation and logistics company, expressed related concerns about various subsidies and funding opportunities.

"It's great for us as Western New Yorkers to say we have all the new companies coming in here, but at what cost?" Rich said. "In a lot of cases, we're forced to compete with companies coming in here with advantages created by New York state."

► FAST FACTS

\$1.6B

Total revenue for Fast Track Companies in 2015

\$164.9M

Total 2015 revenue for nine companies that participated in the Sept. 15 roundtable discussion

\$61.1M

Highest 2015 revenue among nine participating companies (ROAR Logistics Inc.)

474

Total employees at roundtable companies

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► Why has your business been successful?



BARRETT PRICE

CEO, Bear Metal Works

We've grown over the years because of diversification into the nuclear industry, as well as the food service industry. Again, growth is about the

economy. We're hoping to continue that growth with acquisition of another company.

JOSEPH LOWRY III

CEO, RJR Engineering PC

Our recent growth has been mostly a result of acquisitions. It's also been a step back internally that we took to re-systematize our business to make it more effective.

► CLOSER LOOK AT THE ROUNDTABLE

The Fast-Growing Companies Industry Roundtable continues a series of discussions with Western New York business leaders.

Throughout the year, decision makers from diverse industries meet for a discussion moderated by Business First.

Excerpts are published two weeks after the roundtable.

Upcoming topics include foundations, venture capital and startups, banking and transportation and logistics.

Roundtable discussions, sponsored by Hodgson Russ LLP and Freed Maxick CPAs, are held at the law firm's Pearl Street offices in Buffalo.

JOY KUEBLER

President/CEO, Joy Kuebler Landscape Architect PC

We've been here for 13 years and a big part of our growth has been strategically around the world of green infrastructure. So federal level, state level with the DEC. And the indication is that green infrastructure is the way we're dealing with water management. We're dealing with pollution control, particularly around the Great Lakes. As landscape architects, this is work we do very well and we've been able to leverage supplying that service right away. We've been on the forefront of that work for a long time.

JOHN PIERONI

Managing partner, WNY Asset Management LLC

A lot of our growth has come from our partnerships with CPAs. We

work with 40 or more CPA firms in Buffalo and Rochester. They have trusted us with their clients, so that's been a big reason why we grow.

TERRY GALANIS JR.

CEO, Sealing Devices Inc.

We've been in business 53 years. We have grown strictly because of continuous investment in the company. We have not made any acquisitions but we have created additional businesses by adding capabilities to our existing customers so that we now supply a lot of things, too. Most customers today want more product from a smaller number of suppliers. We found out that by adding more capabilities, we can grow our business within our customer market.

TOM MCMANUS

CEO, Kegworks

We've grown a lot because of the craft beer boom. Buffalo is not unique with the number of breweries that are coming online. Every market has that, and we work with a majority of them to help them provide the products that get the beer out of the keg into the glass.

ROBERT RICH III

President/CEO, ROAR Logistics

We are a third-party logistics provider.

We've grown steadily since we started in 2003 primarily through organic growth but also through three acquisitions.

We're constantly looking at acquisitions, constantly looking at upgrading our talent.

The key to our growth has been our people. I think that should be the key to the growth for any company: the quality of the people you hire.



Fast Growing Companies Needn't Get Slowed Down by Complicated Legal Issues



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Hodgson Russ LLP understands the challenges faced by emerging businesses and fast growing companies. We offer economically sound and sensible advice to entrepreneurs and start-ups as well as the private equity and venture capital companies that finance them. Such as:

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- Labor, employment, immigration and employee benefits matters
- Protection and enforcement of all forms of intellectual property rights
- High stakes commercial litigation

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**JIM SPROULL**

Partner, Genesis PPG

Our growth has largely been attributed to strategic partnerships. Kind of like John was saying with the CPAs, we've partnered with financial institutions, smaller community and regional banks that utilize our services for their commercial clients, so we've grown organically. We have not done any major acquisitions.

**ROBERT VEZINA**

President, Life Safety Engineered Systems

Our growth is due to expanding nationally. We have a national presence. Instead of just trying to grow

fast in Buffalo, we decided we had to branch out, so we have capabilities throughout the country and Canada. And the other way we grew is by focusing on service rather than construction-type projects. In the service industry, you tend to keep your customers. So you have a nice base to grow from and can add more services for them and then can get new customers. That's how we grew.

► **You each talked about the road map to growth. What challenges confronted you as you went through it?**

ROBERT VEZINA

Life Safety Engineered Systems

For me, we're growing so fast that we're doubling every two years. So the problem or the challenge is that processes and procedures have to change and get more control.

JIM SPROULL

Genesis PPG

For us, a lot of it deals with trust. When you are starting out in a business, there are typically other players already in that space, and in ours it's large, national companies. Those are the names we have to go up against, so we have to build trust in our clientele.

ROBERT RICH III

ROAR Logistics

As the economy tightens and relationships shift from being relationship-driven to price-driven, providing and proving your value to your customers can be more challenging. I think that proving

your value to customers over not just providing low prices is critical to being long-term partners.

TOM MCMANUS

Kegworks

The rapidly changing online environment from Amazon is a challenge to our consumer business, which is a big part of our business. Amazon poses a huge threat to the way people shop. For us, it also has removed all barriers of entry into our marketplace by using Amazon as a platform. So that has really changed our consumer business. On our commercial side, I agree with Bob that as the economy tightens, we're tied to hospitality construction. I think we're going to see some challenges in the next 18 to 24 months in the economy because we're starting to see some leading indicators of things slowing down.

TERRY GALANIS JR.

Sealing Devices

One of the biggest challenges for business today is government regulation. The economy won't grow fast enough for us. The economy can't grow 1 percent and expect everybody to grow. There's too much government regulation, too much health care cost coming down on the companies. You have an anti-business government not only on the state level but on the federal level, and it's causing people not to spend money on infrastructure, growth and capital expenditures.

JOHN PIERONI

WNY Asset Management LLC

Our biggest challenge is trust. In our world of managing people's finances, you have to build that trust. We've had to do that by actually doing what we say we're going to do. Over the years, now that we're in our 22nd year, it's become easier.

**JOY KUEBLER**

Joy Kuebler Landscape Architect PC

A challenge for us is cash flow. So we are tied to the architecture and construction world, which means that we might win a project in one year and might not actually start that project for two or three years. So we're trying to figure out how we account for that project as a win against revenue, but when do we actually start collecting? On

the other side, once we start the project, we might be waiting another three months to six months to 18 months before we actually see any cash. So as a small business, that is extremely difficult. We are just like an architectural engineering firm. The access to capital has been very tight for us so we're sort of spinning in this very small hamster wheel all the time.

JOSEPH LOWRY III

RJR Engineering

I will echo Joy on cash flow. That's been a big thing for us. We're kind of in the same industry as she is, so cash flow, projecting it accurately and forecasting it – it's a problem. But also how to scale up our administrative side. We can scale up our engineering very easily. We're very good technically at what we do, but then knowing when to invest more in infrastructure, when to invest more in technology. Administratively, that's been a little bit of a challenge.

BARRETT PRICE

Bear Metal Works

Our customers and our growth mean more diversifying ourselves. That means I have to hire more staff, have to have more people educated and retrained into every piece of paper that's related to an order and sign off on the processes as we go along. So retraining experienced workers is a challenge.

► **Some of you mentioned challenges with cash flow. How easy or difficult has it been to get what you need from banking institutions?**

TOM MCMANUS

Kegworks

As you get bigger, there's more people and you need to feed the beast, whether it's inventory to support your growing customer base. Same thing you're subject to when you get paid from your customers. Somehow the banks don't give you that same flexibility, so you're working with that. We're lucky; a big part of our business we're paid upfront so I don't have the huge challenges like the people in architectural construction. But access to capital is always challenging. The SBA is there – it's a great resource but it's also a very expensive resource. I'll be curious to see the impact on the marketplace for access to banking capital with the First Niagara change.

JOY KUEBLER

Joy Kuebler Landscape Architect PC

I'll address the elephant in the room. As a woman in business, I think there's a bit of a misconception across a lot of markets that there are many programs out there to help us and we get an extra advantage. We've actually not found that to be very true. Programs that are set up are at a very introductory level, so when you're trying to grow, you can only get so far. But even access to capital, whether that's through a bank organization or through private financing, to have been told, "Do you have any man who could help you sign this loan" after 13 years of business? That still happens; it happens all the time. We don't have inventory. Our inventory is paper and brain power. So that time lag and not having access to capital in the same way different architecture engineering firms might, has forced us to be very organic with our growth.

► **What's your reaction when a lender asks if a man can sign a loan for you?**

JOY KUEBLER

Joy Kuebler Landscape Architect PC

My first reaction is, I can't believe you actually asked that. And the second, nor would I expect that any other businessperson would have to find a second co-signer for any loan after 13 years in business.

**BARRETT PRICE**

Bear Metal Works

The economy is one thing, but the banks are not that friendly about your business. They want to loan you money ... and all of us here, I'm sure, have personal guarantees that we're going to pay back the loan. And when the economy struggles, it keeps us up at night for those reasons: that we have our life savings on the line and we are still here employing people. But the banks will not reduce any interest rates or any of those things unless you ask. They don't come forward to try and help you succeed in business. They want to lend you the money; they're in business to make money and that's it. They forget about you then. They're there for the deal, one deal, and they move on.

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Life Safety Engineered Systems

For me, the planning for cash needs or capital needs is more my problem because once you realize you don't have enough cash flow or capital, the timing is bad. The banks in Buffalo are pretty good. I've always had good relationships with all of them, so I don't think that's so much of a problem. For me, it's more the anticipation.

JIM SPROULL

Genesis PPG

We're in a service-type industry where we need to take care of our customer service, so we need the customer service people in place before the sale so you can fulfill the expectation of the customer. We try to overstaff with the anticipation of the sale, so that means you're always chasing a little bit. The money is chasing the employee side, but you need to do that if you're going to fulfill the expectation of the customer.



► **What's your view of the economic development environment? What could they be doing to pay more attention to those businesses that have been here awhile?**

BARRETT PRICE

Bear Metal Works

I'll use my business as an example. This year, we're down in sales. My business right now is going through a restructuring phase. We have facilities that we need to upgrade but there's no alphabet company help or help of that type organization wanting to help me restructure my building and fix it up for the long term. I do my own financing. I'm not getting any help from these companies in that sense. It's more of a struggle to budget my money also, and there are more rules and regulations for air monitoring to removal of contaminated materials and stuff. It's just so costly to stay in business and that's what's frustrating.

JOSEPH LOWRY III

RJR Engineering

A lot of our work comes from outside New York state, and every time we try to get back into the local arena,

it's almost always a disappointment. There's these engineering projects that we have a great fit for; we have a good track record. And right down the road from us, someone in Albany comes in and gets that project. I don't expect things to be dropped in the lap of local companies, but it would be nice if there was a recognition of, "Can your neighbor do this as well as someone across the country?" and not force us to look outside the area so much.

JOY KUEBLER

Joy Kuebler Landscape Architect PC

I echo Joe's comments. Particularly in the world of design, they'll hire big firms from New York City or Boston before looking at the talent that's right here, invested and committed. But I think my frustration has more come from the attention that's been given to the tech startup and high-tech entrepreneur competitions. An entrepreneur means any number of things, and to say that a service-industry entrepreneur does not have access to the same amount of opportunity for funding through those various mechanisms has been very frustrating for me.

ROBERT RICH III

ROAR Logistics

I think it's fair to say that we all welcome what's going on in Western New York with businesses coming here, but I think as a business based in Buffalo, that got our start in Buffalo in 2003, nobody subsidized what we did. Nobody said to me, "We're going to give you 10 years of no taxes." Nobody said, "We're going to give you millions of dollars to come to Buffalo." We chose to start in Buffalo because it's our hometown. When you see these companies come in, it's great for the community, it's great for us as Western New Yorkers to say we have all the new companies coming in here, but at what cost? In a lot of cases, we're forced to compete with companies coming in here with advantages created by New York state.

TERRY GALANIS JR.

Sealing Devices

There was an article last week about one-third of the manufacturing jobs have left New York state since 2000. Why did that happen? It's a blue-collar town, basically, from manufacturing but it's changing. You talk about the renaissance. The renaissance in Buffalo is a real estate renaissance, not a renaissance for manufacturing or anything else. That's what a lot of us rely on: manufacturing. So I don't think we're doing enough to bring in the right businesses to the culture we have in Buffalo.

► **How do you balance your company's position in the community with what's happening in the community as far as this renaissance goes?**

BARRETT PRICE

Bear Metal Works

I'm to the point where I think my employees see the reinvestment in my facilities and that's making it better for them to have a better-paying job or work in a better work environment. That gives a little pride and security not only in their job but spreading the word to other people who might want to work for me. The reinvestment here is in the infrastructure, buildings, the equipment, as well as the people. But if they have a good place to work, I think they're going to enjoy it. I think I could find people at this point in time, which has been a struggle in the industry.

JOY KUEBLER

Joy Kuebler Landscape Architect PC

As Terry mentioned, the renaissance has been very organized around property and infrastructure development, which has been helpful for us. We're seeing that growth as very positive for us. But I think internally, since our inception we've had a very transparent shop. So with my employees, we do a lot of strategic planning together. We map out the trajectory as a group so there's a lot of buy-in; there's a lot of support internally from the company. When we have those lean times or waiting a year for a project to start, they're willing to buckle down and help the whole group get us through. Some days where I'm ready to throw in the towel because I'm tired, they've been the booster and the support to say, "We've come through this before, we'll make great strides and we're here for the long haul."

JOHN PIERONI

WNY Asset Management LLC

For our business, the renaissance has impact – maybe a bit down the road – as people feel better about the community. We may not have a lot of people moving here but I think it starts with not having people move away. So that's progress in and of itself. And then after that, you get people moving to Buffalo. And obviously as businesses and individuals do better, in our field of investment management they will be in a better position to take advantage of our services. The renaissance is helping our business because of that.

ROBERT VEZINA

Life Safety Engineered Systems

I'm benefiting from the renaissance mainly with the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus. We provide all the security for them and get free design service in exchange and that's great. But as Joy said, the employees are extra busy but it's a double-edged sword. We need more people, but they're excited because of the opportunity, they see the growth. That's a big deal for my employees.

► **You mentioned it's been easier to recruit and find good employees. Have you done that on your own or have you relied on other sources?**

**TERRY GALANIS JR.**

Sealing Devices

We do the same as we've always done. I mean, having a strong human resources environment that has a lot of connections within the community and resourcing all those. There are still plenty of good people out there. I think a lot of people have a focus on the millennials. They come to a job interview, the younger people, they're not dressed properly, they don't really have the work ethic. A lot of us have seen it and you see it more and more as you try to grow your business and you bring in more people. You're seeing quite a culture change in the way people look at the work ethic today and they want more time off. It's more of a casual atmosphere. We start talking about this a lot in other companies that we deal with. They see the same problems, where to get people.

► **Do you think that's a lack of commitment or just a change in what we consider standard operating procedures?**

BARRETT PRICE

Bear Metal Works

You've got to be flexible, but we have to create procedures and training of people in that culture set and everything has to be done this way and in a timely manner. I can't wait for somebody to get back from the gym at 9 o'clock when we need the doors open at 8. You want to be flexible in your scheduling of people, but the rules and procedures that were implemented make it harder to

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change that culture.

JOY KUEBLER

Joy Kuebler Landscape Architect PC

We found that the millennials who come to us have sought us out and they are aware of our culture, aware of our style of work, the work that we put out on the street. They're actively finding us because they have an interest in working the way that we work. Finding talent across Western New York – landscape architecture is not a dime-a-dozen type of profession. We have had the opportunity to bring people to Western New York, so we've actually been growing population, even if it's only 30 people at a time. But we've had three hires who we brought in from outside the area.

JOHN PIERONI

WNY Asset Management LLC

We've had a challenge of finding talent on our own, so we've had to resort mostly to hiring agencies to find talent for us. It seems like there are no easy ways to find people who are looking for jobs. They all seem to have gone to recruiters or head hunters. You find good talent but you have to pay a pretty fair amount to attract them because they came through a head hunter. If I could comment on the millennials: We share a lot of the same concerns that you have, Terry. Our concern is not that we're inflexible, but will that new flexibility of running a business be successful or is it a fun, nice fad? Perhaps it's more casual, but will it be as productive?

ROBERT RICH III

ROAR Logistics

I think the millennials bring an interesting dynamic to business. There's a lot of energy with the millennials; they're excited. I think they need a challenge but they also need flexibility. I think one of the greatest challenges for businesses that are rigid in their operations and how they do things is how to retain millennials who are full of energy and want the challenges and want to have an exciting workplace.

JIM SPROULL

Genesis PPG

There are facets of the millennials that if you tap into and understand, you can use as assets. And you look at the large companies, the big tech companies across the country, whether it's Facebook or Google, they're built on these models. And if you understand that the millennials love community and they want to have relationships and you foster those within a workplace, you can create that energy so that production

is tied to some kind of incentives and environment within the workplace. Then I think you can maximize the production and the effort.

► **Do you find they want to contribute right away, that they want to help make a difference immediately to your business?**

TERRY GALANIS JR.

Sealing Devices

Millennials are very efficient and they really identify quickly to some shortcomings. They want to do things faster, easier. They want access to information quickly and they get it quickly. They know how to navigate the internet; they know how to navigate things. Young engineers want answers right away so you have to have the technology so they can access the internet, websites, whatever – all the things they need to get the job done. They don't want to wait until tomorrow when a sale comes in. They have a problem now and they want to do it. When you talk about millennials, there's a big dichotomy between very efficient and very energetic ones. And one is that "I'm kind of going to take it easy because society is going to take care of me now. I can live at home and have health care until I'm 26." You have a segment here and it's going to be interesting to see who shakes out where.

► **Can you talk about long-term strategies for your companies?**

ROBERT VEZINA

Life Safety Engineered Systems

My company is a family business. I have three sons who work for me and a daughter-in-law. Grooming them to take over, that's my succession plan for whenever I'm not enjoying what I'm doing, which I don't know when that will be. As far as staying in Western New York, I love Buffalo and now that it's finally turned around – I've been here a long time, over 60 years, and it's finally going on the up – I'm not going to leave now. I really enjoy the people here, the environment. It's like nowhere else in the world. I would never want to leave that.

BARRETT PRICE

Bear Metal Works

It's a little difficult for someone like me to pick up and move my business; that isn't going to happen. There's too much equipment and cost involved with that. Staying here is the plan. Hopefully my son comes along in the business and wants to take over. Again, it comes back to

banking, through the fiscal climate and how we succeed and continue to thrive here. It is predicated by the personal guarantees to pay off your loans. The banks, they control you and what you do. So to say that you want an exit plan, the easiest one is, as you said, the millennials or entrepreneurs want to create an app and sell the company and move on – let somebody else worry about it. That will be nice for all of us to walk away with 10 bajillion dollars.

JOHN PIERONI

WNY Asset Management LLC

Buffalo has given us our business and we have no intentions of ever leaving. I think a community that maybe in the past wasn't growing so fast is a challenge, but I've always thought that if you're really going to work hard, you could do business in any environment. It may not be rapid growth, but I think it just means you have to be better at what you do. You have to be more efficient, you have to be smarter, always trying to adopt new principles and new strategies. But you do business in Buffalo, even prior to this renaissance, and a succession plan is critical. I have two partners. We have always had formal succession plans in place and luckily we have some young, talented people who have potential in the future and hopefully that's the way we'll succeed.



TOM MCMANUS

Kegworks

I think it really speaks to the loyalty of the entrepreneurs to this area. As John said, we operate in this environment because we choose to and we want to,

despite New York state, despite maybe some local regulations you deal with. When you talk to colleagues in other parts of the country and you hear what they pay in taxes, man, it's real fun to think about what you could do with that extra coin. But it speaks to where we're from; we're loyal to this area, we love it. At the end of the day, we're still doing business. New York state still has to be the worst state in the country to do business. So we're succeeding, we're doing everything that we're doing despite the environment, not because of the environment.

ROBERT RICH III

ROAR Logistics

There's a lot of civic pride in staying

in Buffalo, and New York state really does nothing in terms of offering any tax incentives – any incentives, for that matter. Why do we stay in Buffalo? Why do we do what we do and how do we thrive? I think you have to have an excitement about the region. You have to be a hometown booster. You have to be all about Buffalo to say you're going to make your stake in industry in New York state when you don't have the incentives.

► **Do you think other markets may feel the same about their state because they have economic development agencies that are going out and trying to recruit you and other businesses to go there and offering incentives?**

ROBERT RICH III

ROAR Logistics

There is, but there's also a positive vibe. A lot of these places are vying for these businesses, and this ties back to the millennials because when you look at the workforce, they want to work somewhere that's cool and hip. And fortunately, Buffalo has become cool and hip. So these businesses are staying where they are. I think you'll see a lot of companies here that have the same loyalty to their towns and stayed despite unfavorable business climates.

TERRY GALANIS JR.

Sealing Devices

You look at fast-growing companies and we're all entrepreneurs. We navigate around the regulations or anything else; we find a way to work it out. As much as government or anybody can throw in front of you, you still have to navigate, you're still going to be profitable, you're still going to use your resources that you have as an entrepreneur to get the job done. I think that's why you see a lot of companies that want to stay. I have a lot of respect for entrepreneurs and privately help companies that stick their neck out.

JOHN PIERONI

WNY Asset Management LLC

I almost feel like there's a problem with our core business in New York. If we need these IDAs to come up with these special incentives, doesn't that speak to the underlying problem that the way our state looks at businesses is flawed? If they were more pro business, you wouldn't need special programs and the environment itself would be

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conducive to business.

► **What advice would you give to somebody who is a Type A personality and willing to take some risk?**

ROBERT VEZINA

Life Safety Engineered Systems

I would say if you're just starting up, make sure you have enough cash to last for at least three years.

TOM MCMANUS

Kegworks

I will follow up on that. Don't live by your income statement; live by your statement of cash flows.

JIM SPROULL

Genesis PPG

For an entrepreneur to really make it, along with the cash side, there are three components that I see. You need this cash for ramp-up because you could have the greatest idea or greatest product and you could never see it come to fruition because you run out of money to actually see that go to market or to fulfill the service that you're trying to do. The third is network and the people you have around you. I've seen great ideas, great money and great people who just aren't connected enough to get that product off.

ROBERT RICH III

ROAR Logistics

I'd say run lean, stay focused.

BARRETT PRICE

Bear Metal Works

The entrepreneur versus a millennial, two different descriptions. The millennial who is trying to grow a business has to realize it's hard work and more time. You can't show up at 9 o'clock, go home at noon, have lunch and then think the business will grow by itself. You have to work it a long time and you just have to be committed to it.

JOSEPH LOWRY III

RJR Engineering

As an entrepreneur and a millennial, I'd tell someone to ask for help. I'm probably the youngest one in the room, so a lot of people will take me under their wing and mentor me just by default. So take it. If someone is willing to give you help, take it. Everyone wants to help, it seems.

JOY KUEBLER

Joy Kuebler Landscape Architect PC

Thinking back, I started with \$1,000 dollars, a computer and a baby on a hip. There wasn't a lot of opportunity for growth and trajectory the way I wanted to grow as an individual and as a practitioner, so I decided to create that space for me. If someone had told me going in everything that I knew later, I'm not sure I would have done it. I think some of my best advice is to find a mentor and stay with them.

JOHN PIERONI

WNY Asset Management LLC

You have to be willing to take calculated risks, and especially on yourself, with yourself. What I've seen with some small businesses is that sometimes they start pricing a product or service at a real low level. Because they're doing everything themselves and don't have a lot of overhead, they can get away with that and might attract some business because of price. But a lot of small-business owners fall into that trap and then they can't afford to expand.

BARRETT PRICE

Bear Metal Works

You're always changing, you're always evolving.

TERRY GALANIS JR.

Sealing Devices

You have to have a solid business plan, have a solid product, a niche in the market or something that's creative and you just have to have the wherewithal to stick it out. My parents started a business about 53 years ago and they didn't take any money for two years. You really have to put the money back in the business to keep it going.

JIM SPROULL

Genesis PPG

I think the importance of hiring the right people as you grow. For an entrepreneur, you're a Type A personality – ego sometimes goes along with that and the ability to take a step back and say, "I'm actually going to hire people who are smarter than me and better at specific things." Along the way, it will make the best organization.

► **Give us your vision for the next three to five years for your business and what you see happening in Western New York.**

TERRY GALANIS JR.

Sealing Devices

Any business can grow as long as they have an appetite to grow, an incentive to grow. For us, I see the next three years as being strong for us because we've invested in the last five years. There are technologies now that will lead us into different markets. Our challenge now is to get the right people in to go to those markets and seek out the business.

JOHN PIERONI

WNY Asset Management LLC

Business looks good for us in the upcoming years. We've always grown organically but, in our industry, a lot of our peers are reaching retirement age and looking for exit strategies. They might not have a large enough firm to transition internally, so they'll need to be bought out. We are looking for acquisitions over the next three to five years to help grow our business.

TOM MCMANUS

Kegworks

In the short term, I'm concerned about growth. Our business on the consumer side is really tied to disposable income, and if the economy burps, our products are probably the first to go. On our commercial side, we're tied to hospitality construction. Once again, if the economy burps or something longer term, the first thing that stops is hospitality construction. In the long term, we just have to innovate.

JOY KUEBLER

Joy Kuebler Landscape Architect PC

We're actively in a retooling phase. We had tremendous growth and now we've taken that step back, sort of that half-step back to say, "We need to retool and look at the lay of the land before we keep barreling forward." That's our short term. Our long term, at 20 years we'd like to be at 25 people and have planners and engineers as well as landscape architects.

ROBERT RICH III

ROAR Logistics

Being in the transportation industry, our business sort of ebbs and flows with the economy and how other businesses are doing. I see the future is going to be comprised of further organic growth. Hopefully as Western New York takes off, we'll see more

opportunities to do business out of Western New York. We realize that we have six offices nationally now, 120 agents around the world. For us, we have to look at acquisitions.

JOSEPH LOWRY III

RJR Engineering

We see more growth in the next three years. Our growth hasn't just been for the sake of growth, it's been with an end goal. We want to be a certain size of business to give us the capabilities

to do a certain type of project. But we chose to jump-start that with acquisitions. In the past year or so we've doubled the size of our company, so now it's more of an organic strategy. We're going to take it to grow organically and build up, rebuild the foundation under our company.

JIM SPROULL

Genesis PPG

We see great growth potential for our company but, at the same time, we're always analyzing threats. One thing we're always looking at is our industry is largely being commoditized, so people just price shop, price shop, price shop. There's an undercutting or a race to zero in at some level of the products that we offer. We are continually trying to innovate and look at other things we can add, other services, things that are intangible to our customers that you can't put a price on and let those come to the forefront so that we continue to grow.

BARRETT PRICE

Bear Metal Works

I'm going to use a different term. It's not growth, it's rebound. We have flatlined because of oil in the manufacturing sector. That needs to rebound to give the trickle-down to manufacturing and then we will have tremendous growth.

ROBERT VEZINA

Life Safety Engineered Systems

I anticipate that we will continue to grow at the same rate for the next three to five years. We're in facility maintenance and loss prevention. Both those things don't require the economy to be robust.

