


 

Sunday, March 2, 2003

## Chazen improves face of valley

### Engineer leads redesign of cities, towns

By Jennifer McGraw Karchmer  
*Poughkeepsie Journal*

Growing up in the City of Poughkeepsie in the 1950s for Richard Chazen meant riding his bike on Main Street and dodging cars on his way to meet friends. They would skip down to the Luckey Platt department store and ride the elevator.



Karl Rabe  
photos/Poughkeepsie Journal

Today, Chazen's relationship with Main Street is more business than pleasure. His engineering firm, Chazen Companies, redesigned the street for its reopening to vehicular traffic in October 2001. Ironically, Chazen said, his father, Milton Chazen, led the engineering plan that created the pedestrian mall almost 30 years ago.

Richard Chazen, president of Chazen Companies, shows the company's Poughkeepsie office. The engineering firm was started in 1947 by Chazen's father, Milton Chazen, and was expanded into four offices and 140 employees.

City leaders, business owners, and residents alike have been encouraged by the new look for Main Street.



"It's exciting to see things in Poughkeepsie starting to turn around," Chazen said.

A Poughkeepsie native, Chazen has grown a more than 50-year-old family company and infused himself into the community as an active leader.

Chazen works in his office in the company's building on Fox Street in the City of Poughkeepsie. The building is shared with Vassar Brothers Medical Center.

For his commitment to expanding his business and his involvement with community organizations, Chazen is the Poughkeepsie Journal 2003 Business Person of the Year.

"He's a person who's been involved in the community and put his anchor here," said Lee Miringoff, director of the Marist Institute for Public Opinion and a childhood friend. They were born three days apart at Vassar Brothers Hospital in May 1951 and attended Poughkeepsie Day School together.

#### Firm started in 1947

Chazen Companies dates to 1947, when Milton Chazen started the engineering firm in the City of Poughkeepsie. At that time, Chazen had a

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#### PROFILE

**RICHARD CHAZEN**  
Position: President,  
Chazen Companies  
(Chazen Engineering &  
Land Surveying Co.,  
Entrepreneur

nandrui or employees. During his summers as a teen, Richard Chazen would join his father, learning the ropes of civil engineering and land surveying.

"Every summer it was hands-on experience," Chazen, 51, recalled. "My dad had a good master plan for me. One summer I'd be out with crews inspecting pipe installation, then I'd be in the office learning how to design."

Working at his father's company was the start of Chazen's broad education in engineering. Chazen graduated from Syracuse University in 1975 with a bachelor's degree in civil engineering. He is a licensed professional engineer in Connecticut, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania and Virginia.

"I think he sets very high standards for himself and everyone around him," said Dan Stone, Chazen's business partner and president of Chazen Environmental Services Inc., one of the company's divisions.

"He's a very good businessman. He understands the business of engineering better than I do. He's fastidious about quality control. He's proud of our product," Stone added.

In 1986, Chazen became principal of the Chazen Companies as his father stepped down. The firm, which had been adding employees and expanding into other fields, created four divisions to showcase its versatility in the industry: Chazen Engineering & Land Surveying Co., Enviroplan Associates Inc., Chazen Environmental Services Inc., and Teleplan Associates Inc. The company has 140 employees with offices in Poughkeepsie, Newburgh, Troy and Glens Falls.

The four divisions work together providing public and private clients with engineering, land surveying, environmental planning and hazardous waste remediation. Employees at Chazen have varied backgrounds and training in civil engineering, land surveying and municipal planning. Chazen also employs environmental scientists and hydrogeologists.

Pierre Brissette, a civil engineer from Montreal with a degree in biochemistry, joined Chazen Companies a year ago.

"Richard has a good sense of guidance and I was impressed by the company's desire to deliver quality to the client," Brissette said.

Chazen Companies works on wastewater treatment plants, master plans, traffic studies and environmental projects. For the Main Street Conversion Project, Chazen Companies worked with the city, businesses and residents to address traffic flow, parking, sidewalks, pedestrian crossings, street furniture, lighting and signage.

In the Village of Millbrook, Chazen Companies has been the lead engineer for more than 25 years.

"We use them for everything, even a small project two years ago



Chazen

Associates Inc.,  
Chazen  
Environmental  
Services  
Inc., Tele-  
plan Asso-  
ciates Inc.  
**Offices:** Poughkeepsie,  
Newburgh, Troy and  
Glens Falls.  
**Number of employees:**  
140.  
**Age:** 51.  
**Residence:** Town of  
Poughkeepsie.  
**Education:** Attended  
Poughkeepsie Day  
School (K-9); graduated  
Oakwood Friends  
School, Poughkeepsie,  
1969; bachelor of sci-  
ence degree in civil  
engineering from Syra-  
cuse University, 1975.  
**Family:** Children,  
Christopher Townsend,  
31; Cara Townsend, 28;  
Cameryn Townsend, 26;  
Levi Chazen, 22; Caitlin  
Chazen, 20; Colin  
Chazen, 15.  
**Professional experi-  
ence:** Started working  
part time at 12 for his  
father at Milton Chazen  
Associates; began work-  
ing full time for the com-  
pany following college  
graduation. Firm became  
the Chazen Companies  
in 1986, when Richard  
Chazen was named  
president of the com-  
pany. He is a licensed pro-  
fessional engineer in  
Connecticut, Maryland,  
New Jersey, New York,  
Pennsylvania and Vir-  
ginia.  
**Community involve-  
ment:** Dutchess County  
Economic Development  
Corp. board of directors,  
Vassar Brothers Medical  
Center board of trustees  
chairman, Poughkeep-  
sie Rural Cemetery  
board of trustees vice  
president, Poughkeep-  
sie Day School board of  
directors past chairman.  
**Hobbies:** Reading fic-  
tion, traveling, running  
on the treadmill.

where we explored the possibility of three new wells for our water supply," Millbrook Mayor Gary Ciferri said. "They did all the investigation, preparation work and were overseeing the whole project from beginning to end."

LaGrange Town Supervisor George Wade III also praised the firm's work helping the town design a pedestrian-friendly town center. Meantime, construction of the Manchester Water District is expected to begin in spring to provide central water in the western part of town.

### **Plaza created**

Another high profile project for the firm was the demolition of the Western Publishing building on Route 9 across from Marist College. Today, the property is the Mid-Hudson Plaza, which features a Home Depot, Staples, Mobil On the Run and restaurants. The property also includes a vacant 63,000-square-foot spot, which was slated to be a Grand Union.

"It was a derelict facility that sat vacant. We cleaned up past industrial sins, did parking, drainage, wastewater, traffic improvements on Route 9 to make it work as retail plaza," Stone said of the former Western property.

Despite the steady municipal work, the business had a slowdown as the Mid-Hudson Valley struggled with the economic effects of IBM layoffs.

To survive, Chazen established a Newburgh office in the early 1990s. Mount St. Mary College recently hired Chazen Companies to do the civil engineering, design and landscape for a new five-story dormitory.

Chazen then established the Albany area offices, Troy in 1998 and Glens Falls in 2001, to diversify geographically. In the summer of 2000, the company helped create an 18-acre riverfront park in the Town of Stillwater, Saratoga County.

But Chazen's Poughkeepsie headquarters at 21 Fox St. overlooking Route 9 exemplify his connection with his hometown.

In June 2002, the firm moved from offices on Route 55 in the town to the Fox Street location in the city. Chazen bought the property in late 2000 from Kaiser Permanente, a health-maintenance organization that had bought CHP, a local HMO. The site was no longer needed by Kaiser and remained vacant for several years.

The new location allowed the company to double its space, but more importantly, during a time when downtown Poughkeepsie is struggling to revitalize, Chazen's move is seen as a green light to encourage other businesses to embrace the city, community leaders say.

"To have Richard move into the City of Poughkeepsie and restore the building for use and beauty on a very high-profile location has been a real gift," Mayor Colette Lafuente said.

The first floor of the Fox Street building is owned by Vassar Brothers Medical Center, which also uses some of the parking area for its employees.

While Chazen has expanded the family business over the years, he hasn't lost sight of giving back to the community, something he said his parents instilled in him.

Chazen's mother, Fay, died in 2000 and his father, Milton, died in 2001. Chazen has six children ranging in age from 31 to 15.

"He's motivated by honoring his father and building a legacy," said Ann Davis, director of the Marist College Bureau of Economic Research, who nominated Chazen for the award. "He's got personal, family and community accomplishment rolled into one."

Among his community activities, Chazen has been a member of the board of trustees at Vassar Brothers Medical Center since 1986. In 2001, he became chairman of the board.

"He's a great leader. He's the community leader of this organization. He sets the tone, the direction, the mission," Susan Davis, Vassar's president, said.

### **On development board**

His involvement extends to the Dutchess County Economic Development Corp., He joined the agency's board in January.

Especially during a time when Dutchess is addressing growth in the southern part of the county, his experience in urban planning is valuable.

"Having him serve with us is enormously helpful," said Ronald Coan, the EDC's president and CEO. "He deals with quality of life issues every day so his knowledge and expertise will help guide us."

Chazen also serves as vice president of the board of the Poughkeepsie Rural Cemetery and he's the past chairman of the board of the Poughkeepsie Day School.

As a youngster, Chazen attended Poughkeepsie Day through ninth grade. He went on to graduate from Oakwood Friends School. His youngest son, Colin, is a student at Poughkeepsie Day.

Chazen traveled to Syracuse for college, but he returned to live in Poughkeepsie and learn how the region was changing.

As an engineer, Chazen said he gets satisfaction seeing a project go from the planning stages to life such as the reopening of Main Street to traffic to resemble the days of his childhood.

While the national economy is still in a recession and many industries have felt the economic effects of Sept. 11, 2001, Chazen said his business hasn't had much of a downturn. In fact, he's hiring land surveyors and engineers. He encourages new employees from out of the area to experience the Hudson Valley, and to plant their roots.

The natural beauty, the history and the region's proximity to New York City make it even more attractive, Chazen said.

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