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REAL ESTATE WEEKLY

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A/E speakers: industry can ride out these tough times

“Meet the Architects & Engineers,” an annual B-to-B marketing and tabletop exhibit event presented by Professional Women in Construction at Club 101 in New York City on Aug. 21, drew a capacity crowd eager to hear leaders in the field offer their perspective on the future of the A/E/C industry. The consensus: Obstacles will mount, but the industry will rise to the occasion.

Sandra L. Daigler, AIA, chief architect with the Dormitory Authority State of New York, summed it up: “These next few years will [have]... skyrocketing fuel costs, growing global competition for materials, and climate change. We will need to use all of our creativity and know-how to turn those challenges into opportunities for helping our clients achieve their goals.”

Daigler noted also that DASNY now has 694 projects estimated at \$7 billion in progress. She stressed the agency’s strong commitment to M/WBEs (minority- and women-owned business enterprises) with a met goal of 20% participation in 2007/8 totaling \$132.5 million in contracts.

Current DASNY projects include courts in the outer boroughs, a series of renovations and new facilities at such CUNY campuses as the NY College of Technology, Lehman and John Jay Colleges and at healthcare facilities including Harlem Hospital.

Maria Molina, P.E., president, Nova Consulting, said that her firm has grown from a staff of one to 50 in 14 years, an

expansion “not just in size but in technical expertise.” Noting a decline of 20% in the past 10 years of students earning degrees in engineering, she noted Nova’s commitment to “giving back to the community” through scholarships and other efforts. She said: “Engineers are problem solvers. I challenge you all to do the best you can personally and professionally to help increase engineering education. It’s important for our society, our national security and our quality of life.”

JJ Falk, IIDA, president of JJ Falk Design, LLC, discussed the outlook at her 10-year-old firm which specializes in corporate interiors: “Manhattan is trying to feel its way to see where the bottom of the financial fallout will be. There is still opportunity, but we have to scratch harder and turn over more rocks to find it.”

Peter Varsalona, P.E., vice president, RAND Engineering & Architecture PC, said that the focus throughout the industry is on reduced energy consumption and sustainability, evidenced through more energy audits, increased use of “greener products and/or systems that have high energy efficiency ratings” and alternative energy sources including solar panels, high efficiency boilers and hot water heaters, high-pressure natural gas-fired microturbines, and the application of green roofs.

Varsalona noted that Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg has requested a rather Quixotic step: placing windmills – or wind turbines -- on the city’s bridges and skyscrapers and in its waters to develop sources of renewable energy.



Honored guests at the event: Raymond P. Daddazio, Ph.D., P.E., Weidlinger Associates, Inc.; Sandra L. Daigler, AIA, Dormitory Authority of the State of New York; Maria Wilpon, Assoc. AIA, ASLA, BL Companies; Maria Molina, P.E., Nova Consulting; JJ Falk, IIDA, JJ Falk Design, LLC; Peter Varsalona, P.E., RAND Engineering & Architecture PC. Photo by: Howard Wechsler

Maria I. Wilpon, Associate AIA, ASLA, principal, BL Companies, noted that her company has “doubled its office size” by “taking on a diverse group of projects” ranging from under \$1 million to \$400 million. Wilpon understands that “we must be responsible for future leaders. We must identify and nurture them.” She stressed a focus on passion, commitment and momentum.

Raymond P. Daddazio, Ph.D., P.E., president and CEO, Weidlinger Associates, Inc., noted that while revenues and profits in the construction industry have been growing annually since 2003, by late 2009 and 2010 we may feel the “drain on our financial resources” due to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, rising construction costs, and the subprime mortgage crisis.

Political instability in Eastern Europe and the rise of the US dollar against the Euro will find fewer Europeans purchasing condominiums and a decline in tourism.

Hopeful signs include Governor Paterson’s efforts to move the legislature to face fiscal reality, the possible adoption of some form of congestion pricing, a proposed National Infrastructure Bank and green initiatives leading to energy independence.

Event sponsors were: Anchin Block & Anchin; BL Companies; Citrin Cooperman & Company, LLP; Exponent Engineering PC; GZA GeoEnvironmental Inc.; Medina Consultants; RAND Engineering & Architecture, PC; Weidlinger Associates, Inc.; PANYNJ; R.S. Knapp Co. Inc.; MSD Visual; and GIG-Werks.