

SMALL BUSINESS PROFILE

Article 1: Houston Business Journal

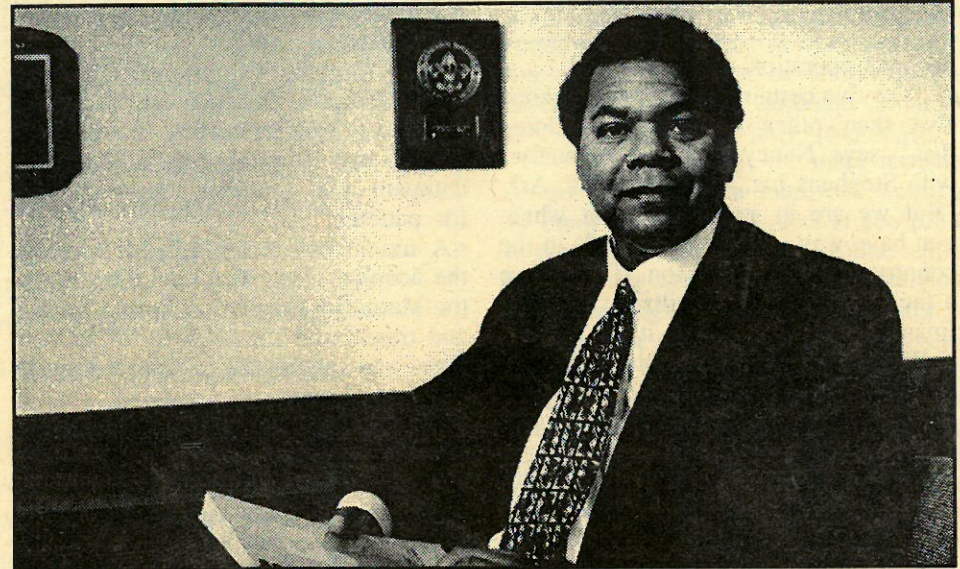


PHOTO BY DAVID FARIAS

Johnson: 'Even back in college, I knew I wanted my own business.'

Down-to-earth engineer makes mark on municipal infrastructure systems

Company: HVJ Associates Inc.

Business: Geotechnical and environmental engineering services.

Founded: 1985.

Employees: 32.

Sales: \$2.5 million.

Background: Herb Johnson has always been a down-to-earth guy.

That's one reason his company, HVJ Associates, has prospered in the business of designing and implementing the construction of streets and other transportation infrastructures.

HVJ, which was derived from John-

pleted the graduate program at Mississippi State and received a master's degree.

It was Johnson's transfer to the Corps district office in Galveston that eventually led him to Houston.

While Johnson enjoyed the jobs he held, he knew he would not be content until he owned his own company, a dream he had since college.

"I thought about my career all the time," Johnson says. "I liked my jobs, but they were just a way of making a living. Even back in college, I knew I

son's initials, works for municipalities to design waste water distribution and treatment facilities, perform geotechnical investigations and advise in the construction of roadways.

Last year, the firm was named one of the 500 fastest-growing private companies in the United States by *Inc.* magazine.

HVJ's services come into play when a municipality such as the City of Houston decides to enlarge an existing road or construct a new one. The city first hires a civil design firm which would, in turn, hire HVJ to perform a geotechnical investigation on the existing roadway or the ground on which a new road is to be built.

HVJ's engineers perform studies to determine the quality of the underlying soil, the probable flow of water, the deflection of the roadway and how much of a load the street could sustain. Then they submit their findings and recommendations on how the road should be constructed to the civil engineering firm.

During construction, HVJ may be hired by the city to supervise construction procedures and materials to make sure they meet specifications. The environmental studies aspect of the business comes into play when HVJ advises on any possible environmental problems that might creep up in relation to the land.

The apparent technicality of it all doesn't faze Johnson, who graduated from Mississippi State University in 1978 with a degree in civil engineering. After working in Atlanta for the Environmental Protection Agency's hazard waste management department for several years, Johnson transferred to the Army Corps of Engineers in Vicksburg, Miss., where he performed geotechnical research. While there, he also com-

wanted my own business."

So HVJ became a one-man company, and although it took six months for Johnson to land his first job, he was able to generate \$80,000 in sales the first year.

Since then, the company's growth has been consistent but "slow enough to manage." Johnson says HVJ has seen a growth rate of between 40 percent and 80 percent over the past few years. He hopes this astounding growth rate continues to the point that his company becomes ripe for a public offering.

"I want to make the company as big as I can make it," he says.

HVJ competes with national and international companies, although most of Johnson's business comes from Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas and Louisiana. Johnson says about 80 percent of HVJ's business comes from the City of Houston alone.

Biggest challenge: HVJ's reliance on the City of Houston for business can sometimes be problematic, since the company's revenues largely depend on the local economy.

"The thought of a recession constantly concerns me," Johnson says. "Things have to actually be happening for me to succeed. People have to be building things, and that can be scary."

It also concerns him that, in order to grow the business, he has to relinquish control over each individual job instead of doing the hands-on work himself. Thus, he says it is vital to recruit and retain quality employees.

"I've never seen a company be successful by staying at one level," Johnson says. "You have to continue to grow or else die. To grow, you have to retain employees by providing them with an environment that will challenge them."

10/13/94

Houston company enjoys meteoric rise

HVJ Associates gains national recognition

By MICHAEL DAVIS
OF THE HOUSTON POST STAFF

It's been a busy two weeks for Houston's HVJ Associates Inc.

Last week the engineering firm was ranked the 67th fastest-growing company in Houston and Wednesday it was ranked the 470th fastest-growing private firm in the nation.

HVJ Associates, along with Topique Associates, ranked 176th, and Calais Home Corp. of Texas, ranked 319th, were the only three Houston companies in this year's Inc. 500 ranking of the nation's fastest-growing private companies.

The annual ranking conducted by the financial magazine is based on sales growth over a five-year period. This year it was from 1989 through 1993.

HVJ Associates posted a 562 percent increase during those five years while Calais had an 829 percent increase and Topique had a 1,406 percent increase.

Two of the companies, Calais and Topique are in the construction industry, Calais is a Texas homebuilder and Topique a commercial general contractor.

The fastest-growing Houston company ranked last week by the Houston Top 100, a local survey of private firms, was Jones Business Systems Inc. It was not eligible to apply for the Inc. ranking because it was not in business, in its current form, in 1989.

This year's ranking is the second time Calais has made the list, having been ranked the 67th fastest-growth firm previously in 1992, said Mike Barrineau, president and founder of the company.

After Calais' last ranking, it received a request to build homes in Atascocita Trails, a request that has turned out to be one of the most successful developments the company has been involved in, Barrineau said.

The company recently consolidated all of its divisions under the name Calsouth Corp. selling homes under the Calais name in Houston, Calmark Homes in Dallas, Brookshire Homes in San Antonio and Coventry Homes in Orlando.

"One of the big keys to our growth has been our low overhead and low-cost approach," Barrineau said. "So far, we have been welcomed with open arms similar to other low-cost alternatives like Home Depot and Wal-Mart."

Bess Herzog, chief executive officer of Topique Associates, said the verdict is still out on what the ranking will mean for the company's business, but "having your name mentioned in a national magazine can't hurt."

Herzog said she intended to apply for the Houston 100 but was so busy compiling the paperwork for the Inc. filing, which includes audited financial statements for the base year — 1989 — and the last year 1993, that she missed the deadline for the local ranking.

The fastest-growing company in the nation as ranked by Inc. was Object Design, a software company based in Burlington, Mass. It posted sales growth from 1989 through 1993 of 23,376 percent.

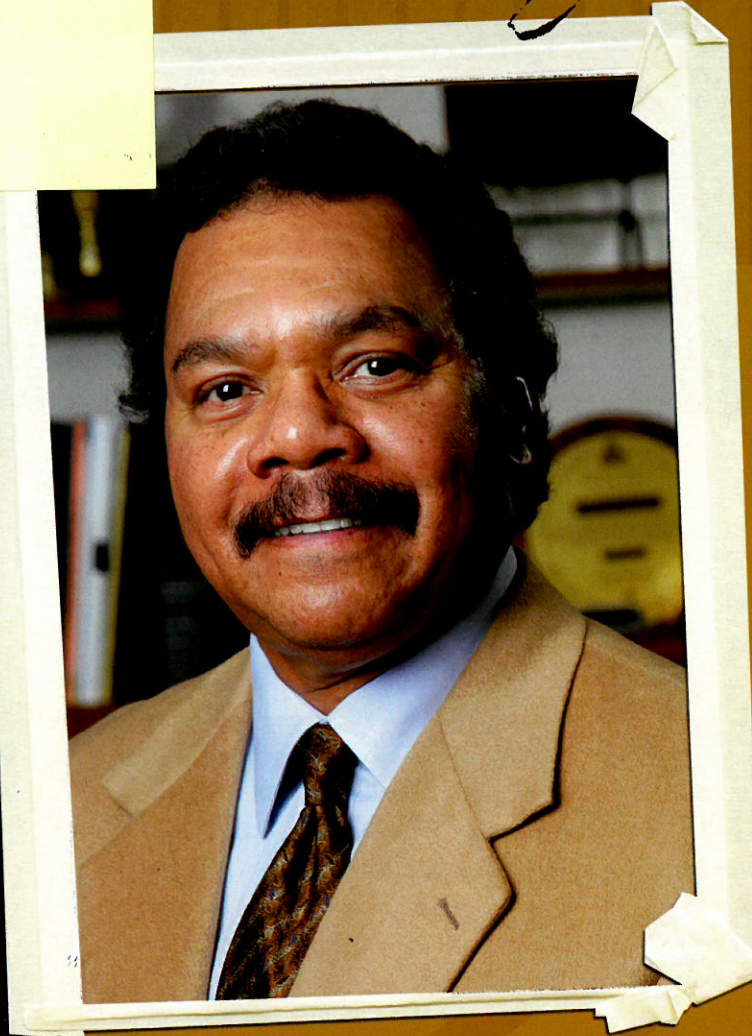
The South, including Texas, had the greatest number of companies making the ranking this year with 165. It was followed by the West with 123, the Northeast with 110 and the Midwest with 102.

Texas had 25 companies on the listing, down from 32 last year.

On the top 500 list

Company	Rank 1994	Rank 1993	Sales Growth 1989-1993	Employees
Topique Associates	176	0	1,406%	14
Calais Home Corp.	319	0	829%	60

Honoring a Heritage



Johnson advances
engineering education
with scholarships

Since 1985, Johnson has owned HVJ Associates Inc., based in Houston, Texas. The company he founded has evolved into one of the major specialty civil engineering companies in the state. The firm has provided geotechnical services for many of the landmark projects in Texas, and is recognized for its vast knowledge of Texas subsurface conditions. The firm is also heavily involved in construction quality control and infrastructure asset management services.

The company was named by The Greater Houston Partnership as one of the 100 small companies having the greatest impact on Houston business. The trade publication *Inc.* magazine recently cited the firm, which has offices in Austin, San Antonio, Dallas and El Paso, as one of the 500 fastest growing private companies in the nation.

“Starting the firm was a way to take charge of my life, exercise personal creativity, and support my interests financially,” said the MSU civil engineering graduate.

Throughout his success, Johnson continues to hold the importance of family close to his heart. He resides in Houston with his son, Herbert II, who is following in his footsteps. The younger Johnson is

The core values of education, family and purpose are important to Herb Johnson. After structuring a career in the engineering industry, Johnson has reached a point in his life where he is taking conscious steps to ensure his legacy.

currently a civil engineering major at the University of Houston.

Johnson understands what it takes to be successful in the field of engineering and wants to do his part to encourage young professionals with similar aspirations. Bringing engineering education to the forefront for African-American students is of personal significance to Johnson.

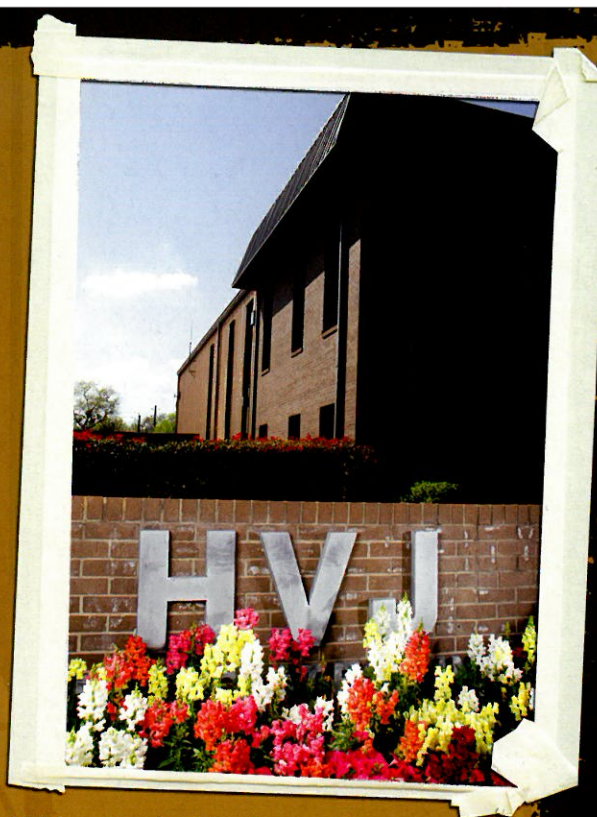
Recently, Johnson created an endowment for scholarships in the James Worth Bagley College of Engineering at Mississippi State. The scholarship will assist students with their engineering studies.

The Jessie and Sarah L. Johnson Endowed Scholarship will benefit students with demonstrated interests and abilities in advancing the interests of African-Americans. The scholarship memorializes Johnson's parents who died in 2004.

"I created the scholarship in honor of my parents out of respect for their memory," Johnson said. "They were in their 90s and were married nearly 70 years before they passed away, just eight weeks apart," he recalled.

Johnson grew up in Mississippi, where his dad was a farmer and his mom was a homemaker in Panola County. Coming from an agriculture background, Johnson was involved with the Future Farmers of America during high school.

"I was active with the FFA and would attend events at Mississippi State University. Since I was familiar with the campus and looked



HVJ Associates Inc. is headquartered in Houston, Texas.

forward to visiting Starkville, it was a natural progression for me to enroll as a student," Johnson explained.

Although agriculture was a large part of his background, Johnson decided to forge a different path and pursue engineering at Mississippi State. He earned a bachelor of science in civil engineering in 1978, followed by a master of science in the same field in 1981.

"The opportunity to attend Mississippi State University was the single greatest opportunity I've had in my life, and if I could lower everything I've done in life to a single common denominator it would be the difference that MSU and my education made," Johnson said.

After receiving his bachelor's degree, Johnson was employed by the federal government, primarily with the U.S. Corps of Engineers, Waterways Experiment Station in Vicksburg, where MSU offers a graduate program of study. Johnson worked full time as a research civil engineering and design engineer while pursuing a master's degree. He also briefly worked for the Environmental Protection Agency.

"The opportunity to attend Mississippi State University was the single greatest opportunity I've had in my life, and if I could lower everything I've done in life to a single common denominator it would be the difference that MSU and my education made."

The government jobs provided him the foundation and the courage to later strike out on his own. From there, starting his own business, according to Johnson, was a fairly manageable process.

"A lot of resources are in existence and are readily available. The difficult and significant part was in mastering the know-how of management and leadership to make valuable offers to clients, employees and business associates, that as an organization, we could reliably fulfill," he explained.

Johnson would definitely lend this advice to others who are considering following the same course. "I would say a commitment to learning is an excellent path—learning about yourself, who you are and your purpose in life. This is where the energy for accomplishment resides," he shared.

HVJ Associates Inc. is widely known in Texas for providing quality engineering services. The firm has participated in many projects which received the Consulting Engineers Council of Texas Engineering Excellence Awards.

"Our company's accomplishments can be directly attributed to the culture of HVJ Associates. Our ability to meaningfully address the cares and concerns of all our stakeholders has set us apart," Johnson noted.

Johnson strives to maintain a connection with Mississippi State University, despite a busy career.

Through the years, Johnson has been a member of the Dean's Advisory Council and the Civil and Environmental Engineering Advisory Board for the James Worth Bagley College of Engineering. He also is a newly appointed member of the MSU Foundation board of directors.

"I had many positive experiences at Mississippi State, going back to the days of high school visiting the campus for special programs," he recalled. "While attending college several of the professors and staff there had a profound impact on me as well—Oswald Rendon, Victor Zitta and Walter Croft were among them," he added.

Rendon, Zitta and Croft were longtime faculty members of the engineering college during Johnson's days as an MSU student. The three men helped steer countless students, including Johnson, toward an engineering career.

"I've found that the benefit of learning cannot be overstated; it's probably a purpose for living along with conscientiously contributing to others of course. Having the opportunity for a college education has positioned me for accessing my personal and unique contribution to the world. An education can do the same for others and it is my reason for supporting the scholarship in engineering," he declared.

As Johnson looks to the future, his past will not be forgotten. In fact, his heritage and belief in education will be honored in perpetuity through the endowment he created at Mississippi State University.

"Mississippi State University has helped immeasurably in my development, and I am deeply appreciative of that," Johnson said. "Years from now, I want people to remember me as someone who placed value on education and one who made the most of his academic background," he concluded.

foundations

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A NEWSLETTER FOR FRIENDS OF THE MISSISSIPPI STATE UNIVERSITY FOUNDATION



*Academics & Athletics
unite for StatePride*

Johnson's just doing it

By Betty McLellen
Staff Writer

Herbert V. Johnson is a man who doesn't mind a challenge. At 32 years of age, with only one year of experience in the Houston area, he began a consulting engineering firm during one of the worst economic years that city had ever seen.

"It was just something I wanted to do," he said. "I had been thinking about working for myself for about four years before I took the plunge," he says of his 1985 start-up. "And I'm glad I did."

Johnson started with impeccable technical credentials, including a Mississippi State University bachelor's degree in civil engineering, a master's in geotechnical engineering, and work experience with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and Environmental Protection Agency.

In the early years it was a lonely enterprise. Johnson made the contacts, wrote the proposals, and performed all the work himself. As the business grew he hired people with skills complementary to his own. The firm has now expanded to 30 employees.

Today not only is Houston's economy flourishing but so is HVJ Associates'. Johnson hopes to have a staff of 100 within five years.

"Every year we have grown 40 to 60 percent," he said. "When I get to 100 [employees] I'll probably change the number to 500."

In 1994 HVJ, for the second consecutive year, was honored as one of the 100 fastest-growing companies in Houston. With sales of more than \$1.9 million, HVJ was also named on *Inc.* magazine's 1994 list of America's Top 500 companies for its impressive 562 percent growth between 1989 and 1993.

SCOPE OF WORK

HVJ services most of the Southwest region of the country, including not only Texas, but Oklahoma, Arkansas, and parts of Mississippi. An engineering firm that serves construction projects with geotechnical, materials testing and environmental services, HVJ offers a full range of specialty technical expertise.

The staff is particularly well suited to perform construction materials testing and geotechnical services on building, transportation, and infrastructure projects. A current project involves foundation investigations for supporting the West Park High Occupancy Vehicle Lane for Houston's Metropolitan Tran-



HVJ principals Michael Hasen, P.E. (left) and Herbert V. Johnson, P.E.

sit Authority.

According to Johnson, a key element to HVJ's success is the integrity of the professional staff. Clients such as engineering, architectural, and construction firms, transportation agencies, municipalities, financial institutions, medical facilities, and school districts come to HVJ because of its reputation in the industry, says Johnson. Prestigious firms associated with HVJ include Brown & Root, Camp Dresser McKee, the Dallas Area Rapid Transit, Chevron, and Southwestern Bell Telephone.

Clients say HVJ's attention to detail and a willingness to make things right, whether on small- or big-dollar projects, gives them an edge over competition.

"In addition to having an outstanding organization in terms of providing good quality service, I think what sets us apart is a will-

ingness to do a good job and do it in a responsive manner," Johnson says. "We get a broad spectrum of clients. Some are well organized. Some are not so well organized. But all of them have a job to do. How we position ourselves to support them determines how well we do in the industry. A client asks us for something and we jump to it. I think that really is the key. Ninety-five percent of the work we do is repeat work so we know how to work with our clients. We anticipate a whole lot. It is just a matter of knowing what they need, recognizing how they are going to ask for it, and actually providing it when they do ask for it."

TRIAL AND ERROR

Johnson maintains that trial and error played a big part in developing his managerial skills. His modestly over seemingly

HVJ Associates, Inc. BY THE NUMBERS

Headquarters

Houston, Texas

Branch offices

None

Ownership

Privately owned corporation

Areas of practice

Geotechnical engineering, construction materials testing, and related environmental

Established

1985

Headquarters

10,000 square feet

Staff breakdown

Principals.....	2
Registered civil engineers	4
Non-registered civils.....	2
Geologists	1
Technicians/Draftspersons.....	6
Surveying/field personnel	13
Administrative	4

Non-competition agreements

No

Owners

1

Board of directors

2 members

1994 total billings

\$1.9 million

Gross profit

15%

Backlog of work

173%

(as a % of annual revenue)

Net fee multiplier

2.8

(net revenues/direct labor)

Work produced by

computer automation 100%

Herculean accomplishments is refreshing.

"You know I try to take as many seminars as I can and really that is how I've learned," he said. "I'm not hesitant about asking when I have a problem in dealing with management issues."

His business development techniques have also come in handy.

"The most difficult thing I encountered was developing clients. I came from the government sector and so I really didn't know any clients per se and it took a while to develop a client base. It was a matter of people getting to know me and getting to know the firm," he said. "The services we offer are specialty civil engineering ones and given that, I make contacts with prime civil engineering firms that do design services directly

for owners. I develop relationships with them and find out what projects are coming up and what projects are being planned at the time. The tough part is getting to know them and developing trusting relationships. After that it is just a matter of asking to associate. That is basically it."

One way to form strategic relationships he says, is consistent socializing at professional association meetings.

"A lot of the work we do is municipal driven and as a result, political activity provides an excellent forum for various consultants. That is a real big opportunity to get to know people and for them to get to know me," he said.

Another reason for the prosperity of HVJ is Johnson's commitment to nurturing the firm's growth. After years of hard work getting the company established, Johnson now divides his time between planning for future growth and risk management.

"I am a very result-oriented and a great delegator. I spend most of my time trying to predict the future, planning, and trying to process work once we get it in the door. I see one of my strengths as being able to assess talent and because I am able to rely on good staff, I don't have to get too involved with operations and day-to-day things," Johnson said.

Avoiding pitfalls that are becoming all too prevalent in the engineering industry — the cost of insurance and litigation entanglements, for example, are major areas of concern these days, he says.

"We work for so many different clients and have to look at so many different contracts with various terms and conditions, we are the

recipients of a lot of risk. Managing that is a big concern to me. I think we do a pretty good job at it, but there is a trend in the industry to push everything down in terms of risk. You know, give your risk to someone else to deal with. The owner wants us to indemnify everything. He wants us to have all kinds of insurance and various waivers of subrogation. Owners want me to indemnify them not only for potential negligence or oversight, but for anything that occurs on the site, whether it is my fault or theirs. Those kinds of things are very onerous to me. It seems like I talk to my legal counsel and insurance man all the time," he said.

But Johnson is a dedicated optimist. The firm continues to flourish under his leadership and opportunities will continue to come,

he says, either in the form of new building projects or rehabilitation of old ones. Even the threat of major federal budget cuts cannot dampen his enthusiasm about the future.

"There is always something going on. Somebody is always up to something as far as having a project in mind for building major roadways or improving ship channels. I don't see those plans coming to an end. If there are no transportation projects for roadways and bridges, there is overcrowding in airports or a need for new runways. The wastewater treatment system needs up-

grading. I don't expect to be going anywhere and I don't think anybody expects me to be. We are going to stay here and take care of things."

Because of the risks and the liability, getting the firm off the ground involved a lot of grief and uncertainty, Johnson says, especially in the early years. His constant balancing act between bringing in the work and keeping a pool of good employees provides a continuous challenge for him but is also a source of much pride.

"Being able to see the number of people who work here, where the company started from, where it is now, and the number of people I think I've helped is what I'm proudest of," he says.

His challenge to fledgling entrepreneurs? "Jump right in and do it. Don't be afraid; things will work out," he says. ■

Does your firm deserve to be featured in "Profile?" Contact Jane Gaboury, Civil Engineering News, 1255 Roberts Blvd., Suite 230, Kennesaw, GA 30144. Telephone 404/499-1857; fax 404/428-6418.

"Owners want me to indemnify them not only for potential negligence or oversight, but for anything that occurs on the site..."

— Herbert V. Johnson

From the editor

It's not too late for surveyors to catch the train

There is great concern these days within the surveying community. That reality was brought home by talking to attendees of the ACSM/ASPRS Annual Convention and Exposition held in Charlotte, N.C., several weeks ago.

Fear was voiced openly throughout the event — in the convention halls, on the exhibit floor, and in social settings — that in terms of technology, the train has left the station and the only way surveyors will catch it is to start running. Over and over, the same theme was voiced: Surveyors are only just beginning to cast a friendly eye on new services and technologies — most prominently GIS and GPS — that are already being fully embraced by other professionals. If surveying is to survive as an industry, surveyors must be willing to change, must be willing to provide those kinds of services that until now they may have considered peripheral to their profession.

One leader within the surveying community went so far as to say that he felt it was already too late for the profession. While many forward-thinking surveyors have recognized the necessity of adopting the changes wrought by high technology, surveyors on the whole were simply too slow to take up the banner, he said. When they turned a cold shoulder on providing GIS services, for example, technicians scooped up the opportunity, which may now be lost to future surveying professionals.

Others at the convention were decidedly more optimistic about the future. They view the changes ahead as a set of challenges that will be addressed largely by the bright young professionals who are being raised and educated in these fast moving, technologically-literate times.

No matter which view was espoused, there was general agreement on one point. The surveying profession, along with professions that have traditionally held close ties to surveying — civil engineering being one — are feeling the effects of rapidly changing market forces, spiraling technology, and greater demands by clients. We are seeing a convergence of related professions and an overlapping of the services that each is willing to provide.

Again and again at the convention I heard that the thing which will separate the firms that thrive from the firms that simply survive

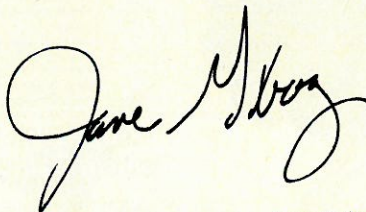
is GPS technology.

Many surveying and civil engineering professionals continue to hold GPS at arm's length: it's expensive, they argue; I can do the work without it; there are limitations in applying it to the kind of work I do; I've just a few years left in the profession, so there's no sense in learning something new now.

Although it's still not inexpensive to get in on GPS, the cost has dropped substantially, making it more accessible to many more firms, even small ones. Just a few years ago, the limitations of GPS surveying were another hindrance to its wide acceptance, but that too is rapidly evaporating as manufacturers continue to refine the technology.

The final gap to be bridged with regard to utilizing GPS to its full benefit, and to the full benefit of the firms employing it, is education. There is a lack of readily-available information not only on how to use GPS equipment, but how to incorporate the technology into one's firm profitably. There is no sense, after all, in using a technology for its own sake. Like adding another name to the payroll, adding a new technology to one's business must contribute to the bottom line.

Take a look at the "Buyers' Guide" beginning on page 54. James Collins has presented a thorough introduction to GPS equipment and we've compiled a table that will provide a jumping off point for those of you who are interested in delving into this fascinating technology. Next month, we'll be following up on that information with an extensive article by James Reilly, who will examine real-world applications of GPS not only for surveyors, but for civil engineering firms as well.



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HVJ Associates: Engineering Success

by Charles Girard

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Materials that don't meet specifications are replaced. While recommending that a section of road or side of a building be redone seldom makes Johnson popular, the project engineer knows that it's necessary. Johnson's integrity is without question.

"The key to Herb's success is his willingness to make things right," says HVJ client Dick Gorini, environmental

affairs manager for the Port Authority. "Whether it's a small-dollar project or a large one, Herb gives the same diligence to every detail."

HVJ is a high-tech company in the truest sense: its techniques, procedures and equipment are state-of-the-art. The latest equipment lines the walls of the testing labs and one of two \$200,000 core rigs sits in the parking lot, ready for action. Johnson's technical credentials include Mississippi State University bachelor's degree in civil engineering and master's in geotechnical engineering, and work experience with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and Environmental Protection Agency.

"I had been thinking about working for myself for about four years before I took the plunge," he says about his 1985 start-up. "And I'm glad I did."

In the early years, it was strictly a one-man operation. "I did it all. I would find the work, write the proposals and make sure the program was carried out to spec," he recalls. "It was hard work, but it was rewarding.

"As the business grew," he continues, "it became necessary for me to hire people with skills that duplicated and/or complemented mine. That way, I could assure my clients that the quality I set out to maintain would always be there." Currently employing 30 people, Johnson hopes to have a staff of 100 within five years.

Clients such as engineering, architectural and construction firms, transportation agencies, municipalities, financial institutions, medical facilities and school districts come to HVJ because of its recognized expertise in the industry. "Our clients normally don't see the wide variety of potential hazards that we do," says Mike Hasen, HVJ operations manager. "And they know we will try to head off danger spots before they become problems."

Currently HVJ is working with the Beneficial Users Group and the Houston Port Authority to design and create a 200-acre demonstration marsh as the prototype for a 5,000-acre marsh that will be used as a habitat for wildlife in the Galveston Bay ecosystem. The first project of its kind in the nation, this manmade marsh is being constructed with soil dredged from the Houston Ship Channel during its widening operations. Johnson faces significant challenges in finding a way to assure that the marsh surface remains at the required height, during both high- and low-tide and in allocating the limited construction materials.

He's faced personal challenges as well. It hasn't been easy, for example, adjusting his management style to the company's growth. "In the past, I was able to work with every project through every step of development," he says. "But now, as we grow, I've learned that I must monitor the projects and leave the day-to-day operations to others. I also have learned that if I am to grow, I must be prepared, which means more time must be spent planning."

His advice for others who consider taking an entrepreneurial plunge? "Do it. Jump right in and do it," he encourages. "Don't be afraid; things will work out." **DBA**

Charles Girard is a local freelance writer and president of the Houston Skyline Theater.

HVJ founder and president Herbert Johnson

The unpretentious address at 6120 South Dairy Ashford and modest office building don't hint at the success story that lies within. But even the sound of Alief High School's marching band floating through the second-story window can't drown out the enormous growth and success of its tenant.

For the second consecutive year, HVJ Associates has been honored as one of the 100 fastest-growing companies in Houston. With sales of more than \$1.9 million, 1993 represented a 147 percent increase over 1991 results. HVJ also was named on Inc. Magazine's recently published list of America's Top 500 companies for its impressive 562 percent growth between 1989 and 1993.

An engineering firm that consults on construction projects with geotechnical, materials-testing and environmental requirements, HVJ gets its name and inspiration from 42-year-old Herbert V. Johnson. The firm's wide variety of services includes determining the practicality of a project, verifying a site's regulatory compliance, design and construction, recommending materials and testing finished products for quality.

"It's easy for human error to creep in when blending a product, especially when batching products like concrete," says Johnson. "We provide quality-control testing and inspection to ensure materials are constructed to specifications."