

BIRMINGHAM BUSINESS JOURNAL

Friday, December 5, 2008 Modified: Tuesday, December 9, 2008 - 1:59 PM

Building & Earth named to fastest-growing firm list

Birmingham Business Journal - by [Lauren B. Cooper](#) Staff



Bob Farley | F8Photo.org

Building and Earth Science's Deepa Bhate and Jeffrey Cowen performed geotechnical engineering work for the parking deck at Fourth Avenue North and Richard Arrington Boulevard.

Birmingham's Building & Earth Sciences Inc. is one of the 200 fastest-growing engineering, architectural and environmental consulting companies in the country.

That's according to the recently published **ZweigWhite Hot Firm 2008 List**, where the company was the only Alabama-based firm listed.

Building & Earth ranked **No. 158** on the list with 72 percent revenue growth between 2004 and 2007 and **No. 3** in the nation on its **fastest-growing geotechnical firms list**.

While the company credits some of its growth to a booming economy in that four-year period, internal growth and accessibility to clients over the years also played a major hand in Building & Earth's success, said Jeffrey A. Cowen, co-founder and vice president.

During that time, a lot of the company's work was in new housing subdivisions, multifamily complexes and retail shopping center developments, said Cowen.

And as the company started to grow, it began putting out feelers to diversify its services into other industries. As a result, Cowen said the company's work has been seamless during a time of economic uncertainty and turmoil. It even shied away from acquisitions that would have had the firm growing for the sake of growing, he said.

“We have very low turnover and we work with a lot of other firms,” he said. “Our growth is coming from high-quality people and internal growth.”

Today, a lot of the firm’s work is in health care, government and industrial, said Matt Adams, Building & Earth’s business development manager.

Currently, it’s providing geotechnical services at the new Women and Infants’ Hospital at the **University of Alabama at Birmingham** and at the parking deck extension in downtown, as well as another hospital in Arkansas and a manufacturing facility plant for **Gulfstream Aerospace Corp.**, said Adams.

Building & Earth offers construction materials testing, geotechnical consulting, forensic and expert witness services and environmental consultation.

The firm started in 1999 and has grown to 160 employees in 10 offices throughout seven states. Each office opening was the result of following the need of a client and building additional work in that area, said Adams.

ZweigWhite, publisher of the fastest-growing list, is a management consulting and research firm for the architectural, engineering and environmental consulting industries.

Laura B. Rothman, a principal at ZweigWhite, said the list has been consistent in demographics and company size over the past few years, with a lot of firms from the Southeast and California appearing. And despite the economic downturn, she expects about the same caliber of revenue growth among firms in next year’s list.

“A lot (of the companies on the list) have been involved in merger and acquisition activities propelling them to be on the list year after year,” she said. “And we expect new ones next year – maybe not (with the same growth) across the board on all of them but some will have high growth. Some haven’t been affected by the economic downturn.”

The mix of companies on this year’s list are diverse, but the ones that did very well were involved especially in environmental, energy and utilities, she said.

LAI Engineering, which has an office in Birmingham and is based near Atlanta, ranked No. 44 on the fastest growing list, with 252 percent revenue growth and was listed in the top 10 small firms, with one to 99 employees.

lbcooper@bizjournals.com / (205) 443-5635