

**SHOWCASE AWARDS**

**> 2020**

**CEA LIEUTENANT  
GOVERNOR'S AWARD**

**> For Distinguished Service**



# Always an Engineer

Bob Gomes' impressive career was built on a commitment to learning, a love of business and a strong sense of leadership

BY ELIZABETH CHORNEY-BOOTH

## WHEN THIS YEAR'S LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR'S AWARD

for Distinguished Achievement winner, Bob Gomes, started his career, he certainly didn't expect to end up as the CEO of Canada's third largest engineering firm. But his love of the business, willingness to learn about a wide range of engineering disciplines, and innate understanding of people led Gomes to an extraordinary career that ended with nearly a decade as the CEO of Stantec, a company he was with for nearly 30 years before retiring in 2017.

Growing up, Gomes enjoyed building things, but he never really considered becoming an engineer. In fact, he started at the University of Alberta in a general science program, with the intent of one day going into medicine. But after taking a number of organic and inorganic chemistry classes, he realized that a science-based career might not be something he excelled at. Since many of his friends were in the engineering program, he decided to join them and see where it took him.

After graduating in 1978, Gomes was offered a job with the Edmonton land development firm Walker, Newby and Associates Ltd., where he learned some valuable career lessons early on.

"George Walker from Walker, Newby and Associates Ltd., who really was my first mentor in engineering, taught me the value in volunteering on nonprofit boards, which taught me the benefit of leading without leverage," says Gomes. "Leading a nonprofit board where the other board members don't get paid for what they do and don't report to you as their boss, requires a much different leadership style. You need to find consensus, compromise. You need to find agreement in the best solution where many different solutions exist, but do it in a way where all the board members can agree on the direction. This experience gave me the skills to use that style throughout my career."

Though Gomes valued Walker's mentorship and enjoyed the work he was doing at Walker, Newby and Associates, when the local economy crashed in the late 1980s, he decided to seek the stability of a bigger firm and joined Stantec (then called D.R. Stanley Associates).

Starting out at Stantec as an urban land project manager, Gomes worked his way up the ranks, holding increasingly more senior roles in both operational and practice areas before becoming CEO of the entire company in 2009. He's particularly proud that he's managed to stay in Edmonton for his entire career – he was able to negotiate the 2018 move of Stantec's headquarters to downtown Edmonton's

Ice District, creating the largest office tower west of Toronto and redefining Edmonton's downtown. Helming such a large company in his home city gave Gomes a tremendous sense of accomplishment, even if it wasn't what he was looking for when he first became an engineer.

"Becoming CEO certainly wasn't my target early on," says Gomes. "But an opportunity arose and I saw that I could impact the company even more by taking the role of CEO. When I took over that role we were around 8,000 people, and when I left there were 22,000 people in the company."

That growth comes from Gomes' talent in acquiring smaller engineering firms that would help strengthen Stantec as a company. Having served as the president of the Consulting Engineers of Alberta from 2003 to 2004, Gomes credits his work with the CEA in helping him to better understand the larger engineering landscape. Since his own hands-on expertise was largely in land development projects, working with other CEA members helped him to broaden his knowledge and better build Stantec's portfolio of acquisitions.

"CEA provided me with the benefit of really understanding how much added value a small firm can provide to a larger firm like Stantec," Gomes says. "Having that understanding of how small firms work and what makes them tick provided me a great base for that aspect of being a corporate CEO."

Even though Gomes' career was demanding, he was always fortunate to have the support of his wife Diane, as well as their son and two daughters. Gomes says he's humbled to receive this year's CEA Lieutenant Governor's Award and credits his colleagues at Stantec (where he still sits on the board) for the honour. "This is really an award to my friends at Stantec and my clients who provided me the opportunity of being an engineer," he says.

Gomes also says that, although he spent so much time in upper management, at heart, he remains an engineer. The love of design and creation of projects has always informed Gomes' decisions at Stantec and is another reason why he feels so moved to be honoured by his peers.

"Stantec became something that was more of a corporation than an engineering firm, but I have always loved engineering," Gomes says. "I didn't become CEO because I wanted to be CEO. I became CEO because I was a good engineer. I'll always think of it that way." ■