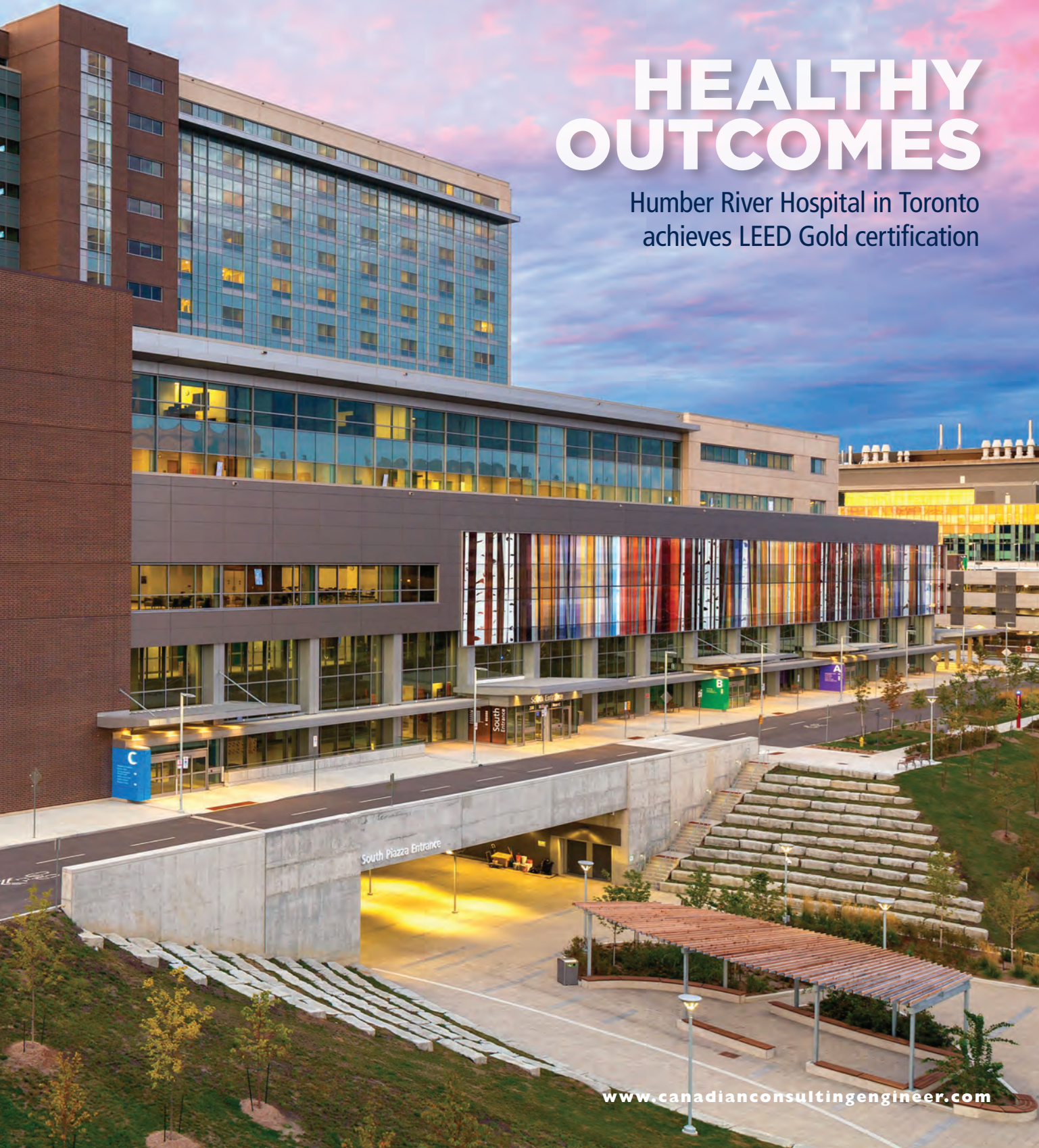


CANADIAN CONSULTING engineer

HEALTHY OUTCOMES

Humber River Hospital in Toronto
achieves LEED Gold certification



The New Stone Age

Picco Engineering, located just north of Toronto, is celebrating its 25th anniversary in the consulting engineering business. Started by Mike Picco as a structural engineering firm, the company has evolved into a specialist in stone consulting for high-profile national and international projects. Growing from a one-man operation to a team of over 40, we spoke with Picco about the development of his business.

How did you get introduced to stone?

I was exposed to natural stone during my first job out of school [McMaster University Engineering, class of 84]. It was a precast company that did some stone cladding work. Then I worked at a structural engineering firm with a few stone cladding clients.

One of those companies approached me to develop an in-house engineering and drafting department for their exterior stone cladding division. I worked with them for about four years until the early 90s when work tailed off and I was laid off.

You started your own business in 1992, what was your plan?

I started out locally with general residential engineering, and I also started reaching out to companies in the stone cladding business. In the first couple of years I did all of the drafting, engineering and accounting, and as the business started to grow I hired one drafter out of college and it really ramped up from there. We still have three pillars to the business: local residential and structural engineering, which together account for about 30%; and stone consulting which is global and accounts for 70%.

How did you grow the business?

I saw an opportunity specializing in stone. It was a growing sector, and there wasn't a lot of knowledge in the



Mike Picco, founder of Picco Engineering, specialists in stone engineering.

market. I started exhibiting at Stone Expo, the industry show run by the Marble Institute of America (MIA). I met people and started doing work for some U.S. companies, landing a couple high-profile jobs. That gave us credibility and we grew from three people to 10.

After a few years I started sponsoring the MIA Awards Luncheon, I figured I could meet all of the major players. And two years ago I was elected to the MIA Board of Directors (a five-year term).

Who are your primary customers?

Our primary contracts are with stone installation contractors, but we're getting more involved with architects and becoming part of the primary design team, helping source and specify materials.

How large do you see the company becoming?

For me personally, I'm satisfied with the size of the company, but I have to continue to grow the company to provide opportunity for the employees. If there is nowhere for them to grow, you're going to lose good people.

Was identifying a niche critical to your growth?

Yes, and I love that part of the business—the natural stone and the history behind it. It's become a passion for me. You have to love what you do, and if you do I think you're going to drive your own success.

How would you describe your personal management style?

I coached hockey until my son outgrew the sport, and I like to run the company similar to coaching a team. I often reference John Wooden (famous UCLA basketball coach), and he developed the pyramid of success, it's the building blocks of building a strong team. Everyone here has a pyramid on their desk and we refer to that in our day-to-day activities, in how we approach clients and how we deal with challenges.

Are there projects you've worked on that bring a smile to your face?

There are so many, but a couple that stand out include the Ark of Return at the United Nations in New York. It's the first permanent memorial erected at the UN. Another is the Canadian Museum for Human Rights in Winnipeg. We were involved from the beginning with the renowned architect Antoine Predock. We went to Spain with him to help select the stone.

What trends get you excited today?

The advent of building information modeling, BIM, has allowed architects to get much more creative, and they are pushing the limits, which we really welcome. It drives more challenges and pushes us to innovate. So those are the types of projects that we love to get involved with, and we've got a BIM innovation team making sure we can facilitate the challenges that are going to be out there.