

# TALLAHASSEE DEMOCRAT'S 2007 TOP WOMEN IN BUSINESS

## PARTNERS KEEP ENGINEERING FIRM VITAL

By Steve Liner

DEMOCRAT BUSINESS EDITOR



**Karen Bass**, professional engineer, and her business partner, Rick Moore, have been in business together since 1991, and they have grown Moore Bass Consulting into a diverse, multi-city engineering and land-use planning dynamo.

What does Bass say is the secret to the firm's success?

"When Rick and I left (another engineering firm), we said we couldn't believe they let us go," Bass said. So the pair vowed to keep their firm vital by doing all they could to retain young, enthusiastic and valuable employees.

The strategy has not always succeeded in the short term, but is a great business plan in the long run, she said. The key, she said, is recognizing talent, honing each employee's skills and then accommodating for life needs and life goals of that person.

"The danger is you'll invest in someone, and things won't work out," she said, telling the story of a biologist that became a partner at Moore Bass's operations in metropolitan Atlanta.

"She was excellent, someone whose work we really admired and who was very valuable to our operation," Bass said. "So when she came to us really wanting to start an office in Columbus (Ga.), we said we would give it a try because she had a major client she had developed there. But, after three years, we found it was a great market for biological services but was not productive for us in our other areas. So we decided to close the office. When that happens, you lose a valuable employee, and that makes the financial loss seem insignificant."

Did it sour the firm on the approach? Not at all, she said, pointing out that employees who started at the Tallahassee office are now successfully running expansion sites in Destin and Panama City Beach and in Newnan, Cumming and McDonough, towns that sit south, east and north of Atlanta.

Bass and Moore became acquainted as they worked together for another Tallahassee engineering firm. And both decided to leave "because they did not make a place for us to grow," Bass said.

"So we said to each other when we created this firm, 'We're going to look for the

**Moore Bass**  
CONSULTING



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best people we can find and keep those people,' " she said.

To accomplish this, she said, she "asks a lot of questions, listens a lot and talks a lot" with firm employees. "Sometimes (talking) helps people recognize limitations, often leading to an understanding of what's best."

What started as Moore Bass Bibler in 1991 became Moore Bass several years later. The name change was completed at the end of 1999, according to firm records.

"We're 100 percent about private land development," Bass said.

However, that footprint is broad enough to include a great deal of work on development at Florida State University.

Today, the firm has about 150 employees, up from the original two (Bass and Moore) and includes biologists, landscape architects, land surveyors and planners as well as civil engineers.

Technology has played a large part in the firm's growth over the past 15 years, Bass said. "We came along at the right time. From the beginning, we were presenting clients with computer drawings when other, older firms had rooms of drafters making beautiful drawings."

Bass said her educational experience was much the same way.

"I went to engineering school with a slide rule," she said.

But her firm was one of the first in the use of computer-aided drafting and design.

Bass herself is committed to Tallahassee and staying here, calling hers the "perfect job."

" 'Wow,' I say to myself. I get to use my knowledge and meet with people and relate to them. Now that is perfect," she said.

She has branched out into a second business, KKB Construction, a builder and renovator of homes.

"We do two or three a year," she said about the business that includes her husband.

Long recognized for her skill as an engineer and her business acumen, she has served on the committees that developed Florida's land-use planning system and regulations as well as corporate boards like the board of directors of the Bank of Tallahassee.

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