

Sosnowski engineers successful career

By ELIZABETH HARMON - Special to the Business Journal



Sarah Nader — snader@shawmedia.com Engineer Chris Sosnowski is the manager of the Technology Department at Baxter & Woodman Inc. and was elected to the firm's board of directors at age 36. Sosnowski also developed and manages B&W's Control System Integration LLC, a subsidiary formed in 1999. (Sarah Nader ())



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CRYSTAL LAKE – Chris Sosnowski's father nurtured his interest in science and mechanics. His mother taught him to care for the environment. A new direction for his company sparked his interest in technology.

Today, all of those passions play a part in Sosnowski's professional success.

As a civil engineer with Baxter & Woodman Inc., Sosnowski specializes in water and wastewater engineering. As the general manager of the company's technology subsidiary, B&W Control Systems Integration, Sosnowski helps communities use technologies to create efficient solutions, such as a control network that manages the water system for the city of Crystal Lake.

"All the water towers and pump stations need to be able to communicate with one another. Now the water superintendent can sit down at a computer and see what's going on at all of them," Sosnowski said. "It saves time and taxpayer money because it's more efficient and it saves the environment because there's less driving."

A Park Ridge native, Sosnowski's fascination with science was encouraged by his supportive – and brave – parents.

"I took apart my toys, often my dad's toys, to see how they worked. The day I took apart the VCR was not a good day in our house, but I was able to get it back together," he said. "I had a chemistry set in the basement. It sounds kind of nerdy, but it was what I was interested in."

His mother instilled a responsibility to care for the environment.

"Even as a young child, before it was fashionable, I remember going with her to the recycling center," he said.

In 1995, he graduated from the University of Illinois with a bachelor's degree in civil engineering. In 1996, he earned a master's in civil and environmental engineering from the University of Wisconsin. He joined Baxter & Woodman in early 1997 as a civil engineer, specializing in water and wastewater designs.

One of the first people he met was Deborah Finn, Baxter & Woodman's marketing director.

"I was in one cubical, he was in another. He was so full of ideas and enthusiasm, I enjoyed working with him from day one," she said.

Through the late 1990s, Sosnowski took a leadership role when then-CEO Don Schwegel challenged his employees to integrate technology into the business. His work with contractor Bryan Nash inspired Sosnowski to discover new technology solutions. He became the manager of the firm's Information Technology department, and in 1999 helped establish a technology subsidiary, B&W Control Systems Integration.

"What started as a hobby became a passion, grew to be a job and now, it's become the center of my professional life," he said.

But the workplace isn't the only arena where Sosnowski gives his all.

As a member of the Evangelical Free Church of Crystal Lake, Sosnowski serves as a youth ministry leader in the church's iNFUZE youth program, mentoring high school students.

"Chris has an incredible love for people and he's filled with character and integrity. Helping high school students take the next steps into adulthood and succeed is one of his passions," said Ron Kirkeeng, the church's middle school youth pastor and a friend of Sosnowski's for the past 13 years. "He gives 110 percent to everything he puts his mind to."

Sosnowski also is a bass player for the church's worship team band and has performed with the Sinful Saints Dixieland Band, the Crystal Lake Community Jazz Band, and a local acoustic rock band, Edison Service.

"Music is an escape for me, a creative outlet. I do it to relax,," Sosnowski said. "It's also a gift God gave me, so if I don't use it, I feel like I'm doing God a disservice."

At home, spending time with his wife and their three children often means making music together. Oldest daughter Alicia recently started piano lessons, the younger children like to sing along, Sosnowski said.

"I view myself as a person who believes in the importance of community and we want to be part of it any way we can," he said.