

# BUSINESS

## Engineering expansion



A rendering of a heliport that will be added to the West Palm Beach Veterans Affairs Medical Center. The prime design consultant is QproQ Engineering, a Wilkes-Barre firm that has overseen several regional heliport projects.



TIMES LEADER STAFF PHOTO/FRED ADAMS

Jim Kerns, president of QproQ Engineering, a Wilkes-Barre engineering firm that is involved in some key economic development projects, like the ones at Graham Packaging Co. in West Hazleton and the Mission Foods project in the Crestwood Industrial Park. The firm recently landed a heliport project at

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**W**ILKES-BARRE — Some colleagues thought Jim Kerns was taking a long shot when he pursued a heliport project in Florida.

Kerns agreed — but he also knew that his small Wilkes-Barre engineering firm had the expertise and ambition to handle the job. So, he wasn't surprised that QproQ Engineering, Inc. made it to the top three and eventually was selected as prime design consultant for the \$500,000 emergency room heliport project at the Veterans Affairs Medical Center in West Palm Beach.

"It's not a big project, money-wise, or a difficult project, but it's a unique one and an ideal fit in our strategic plan as a firm," Kerns, company president, said. "It encompasses three of our target markets — government clients, the health-care industry and heliport design."

QproQ is fast becoming an expert in heliport construction. The 14-year-old company was the consultant on similar projects throughout the region: at Aventis-Pasteur in Swiftwater; WNEP-TV in Moosic; Pocono Mountain Medical Center in East Stroudsburg, and at Community



### ABOUT THE COMPANY

QproQ Engineering, Inc. was established in 1991 by Jim Kerns of Wilkes-Barre. In 2000, the company bought a building at North Main and North streets, Wilkes-Barre. QproQ employs seven people and is looking to add three people to its work force this year.



QproQ projects have included the Carbondale Public Library, Lackawanna County.

Medical Center, Scranton.

Most of the company's jobs are centered around the Pennsylvania-New York-New Jersey region, so landing the heliport contract in Florida accomplishes the market expansion QproQ has been seeking.

### High expectations for 2005

The firm's continued success and what Kerns views as a rosy outlook for the coming year are generating an internal expansion as well.

The engineering firm expects to add three people to its seven-person work force this year, including two engineers and a designer.

"2005 is looking really good for us," he said.

Kerns' firm is involved in some of the area's biggest economic-development projects — some he can talk about and some that still haven't been announced.

QproQ is overseeing the construction of a 600-foot-long bottle conveyor bridge between Graham Packaging Co. and Dial Corp. in the Valmont Industrial Park in West Hazleton. Graham is establishing a plant here to supply the bottles for Dial. The project is expected to be in operation this spring.

This week, it was announced that QproQ is part of the team that is converting a structure in the Crestwood Industri-

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al Park into a Mission Foods factory that will make and distribute tortillas throughout the Northeast.

The two projects are creating more than 300 manufacturing jobs in Luzerne County.

But, don't ask Kerns to tell you what projects are the most challenging — or even his favorites.

"The most challenging? I wouldn't say any one in particular," he said. "Some are more complex than others."

"And, my favorite one is the current one, whatever I'm working on at the time," he said. "I get pretty excited about all of our projects."

That's a lot of excitement since QproQ has completed numerous projects in the last few years — from the renovation of the St. Pius X Seminary in Dalton to the field house, football stadium and natatorium for the Dallas School District. The firm also has overseen numerous projects for health-care facilities as well as civil projects like bridges.

### Expanding its client base

Kerns admits that getting the

Florida job was rewarding — and he credits a solid, well-prepared presentation.

"People were skeptical," Kerns said. "They didn't think we'd get it. But I looked at the project and said We can do it."

After the one-hour PowerPoint presentation in Florida, Kerns said, the Veterans Affairs officials told him that no other firm compared with QproQ's knowledge, experience and preparation.

Kerns, a Philadelphia native, founded QproQ in 1991 and in 2000, bought a building at the corner of North Main and North streets. Kerns manages the company and engineer Nathan Tollin-

ger oversees the technical management side.

About 18 months ago, the firm began an aggressive campaign to expand its client base.

"We are moving into other geographic areas and our marketing is more aggressive," Kerns said. "We're getting more aggressive about advertising our projects in trade publications."

"But, when it comes down to it, the best marketing is if a job is well done for a client, if we are responsive, on time and within budget."

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University of Scranton's Kania School of Management Brennan Hall building was one of QproQ's projects.