



KEEPING IT
TOGETHER

Collaboration is the key to success at Rippe Associates. Amelia Levin speaks to president **Steve Carlson** FCSI and team about building a business on passion for the industry

Relationships + quality + integrity = outcomes. This verbal “equation” – the result of a recent Rippe Associates strategy meeting – describes the company perfectly.

However, Rippe has had this reputation for decades. Newcomer Darren Peterson says he knew this as a former client, so he was surprised that the value statement was only a year old.

Maybe there’s a clue in the actions of president **Steve Carlson** FCSI. In an interview for this article he was quick to divert to the team and showcase them, not himself. There’s no ego in this office. “We’re the nice guys,” says **Christine Guyott** FCSI, RD, principal. Long-time clients, fellow consultants, manufacturers and other industry partners know this well.

Perhaps what makes Rippe unique is its ability to draw experts from different segments of the industry as well as cultivate expert equipment specialists, REVIT designers and others from within that helps them serve as a one-stop-shop completely dedicated to the client. Every principal and member of the Rippe team has a passion, not just for the industry, but for the individual segments they service, from healthcare to education, gaming, B&I and more.

Indeed, Rippe’s structure is built around its various principals, with “studios” that include a handful of other associates, including equipment and Revit specialists, spec writers and project managers. While each studio tends to have its own segment



specialization, there is still some overlap between teams, and teams will often work together when there’s a particularly large project or deadline looming.



The longevity among many team members also contributes to Rippe’s unique strengths, team members agree. “We are very fortunate that we have a lot of people who have been here for many years or decades,” says Trish Jass, senior operations project manager, a 20-year veteran of the firm. “Working with the same staff for many years makes us function more efficiently, and we all know each others’ strengths, which makes projects run smoothly. Outside of work, we know each others’ families so it makes for a more enjoyable environment and that has an impact on how we work together.”



The independent working environment is also a strength of the firm. “Steve doesn’t have to check in with us because we all know what we need to do,” says Mike Wrase, senior project manager. Still, every Monday, the office comes together to share punch lists,

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lessons learned and otherwise check in with each other.

“We focus on sharing information between teams,” Carlson says. “Sometimes, when you’re deep in a hospitality or university project you don’t think about sharing best practices. That’s why we meet regularly and even set up committees to make sure we do that.”

Previous committees have revolved around Revit, sustainability and more. Prior to shows like NAFEM, Carlson will even “assign” equipment specialization to different team members so they can divide and conquer and return to teach each other what they learned. There’s an ice cream expert, a pizza equipment expert and more.

The history – and culture – of Rippe Associates begins with Robert (Bob) Rippe. In 1981, Bob, a dietitian,

formed Robert Rippe & Associates, Inc., and rapidly earned a reputation for healthcare foodservice design expertise. He then expanded the staff to include people from varied backgrounds such as restaurants, food and nutrition management, architecture and design.

“Bob’s legacy and philosophy is that you cannot design a functional kitchen unless you know how it operates,” says Guyott, also a dietitian. “He believed that you should first and foremost understand foodservice operations, and then you could be taught the design aspect.”

Carlson says Rippe also enjoyed and excelled in project management; another hallmark of the firm. “Bob’s approach was how is this place going to operate? How are the departments going to be set up and how many people are going to be working in each one? Only after those questions are answered can decisions about design and equipment be made.”

In 2006, when Rippe retired, Carlson purchased the company and took over as president. Today, Rippe continues to grow based on established, successful relationships, illustrated through over 80% of its work resulting from referrals and continued client relationships.

“I always joke I’m president because someone has to be,” Carlson says. “I’m not the one bringing in all the projects



and assigning them out; that’s the job of all of our self-operated entities.”

The Rippe approach

Rippe’s design process involves all project players (architects, engineers, managers, chefs, etc.) in decision-making from the start of a project, including many in-depth work sessions with the foodservice team. Principals develop the facilities design, oversee schedule and budget, and coordinate with the architect and owner, while the project manager serves as the primary communication liaison, supervising the drawing work and monitoring equipment installation.

Rippe also has equipment specialists who are responsible for the functional program and equipment selection, and who help with design details and follow-through after a facility opens. Everything is meticulously documented to provide as much transparency and information as possible. There is also support for LEED consultants and project teams as well as assistance in selecting energy-efficient equipment and in meeting other sustainability goals. Ultimately, Rippe leaves all of the final decisions up to the client/operator.

“We try to remain as transparent as we can so they can make good decisions,” Carlson says.

Recognizing that more architects are using a 3D modeling process, Rippe prides itself on mastering Revit as



Clockwise from opposite page: Friendship Village of South Hills kitchen;

new options at the University of North Dakota; bar at the Surly Brewery

Three top Rippe projects

Surly Brewery, Minneapolis, MN

- Opening date: December 2014
- Project size: 37,150 sq ft
- Equipment package: \$1,317,845
- Peak volume: 1,060 – 1,125
- Seating: beer hall (300); beer garden (500); restaurant (125-150); event space (135-175)

This multi-venue, multi-experience destination brewery features a beer garden, beer hall, fine dining, and a private dining space with additional kitchen equipment. The central kitchen includes a smoker, a pizza oven, and a 40 ft a la carte cook line. In the open-air dining space reclaimed wood was used for the tabletops, and the chairs were made from recycled plastic bottles.

Friendship Village of South Hills, Upper St. Clair, PA

- Continuing Care Retirement Community
- Opening date: September 2014
- Project size: 295 independent living; 89 healthcare; 19 memory care
- 150-Seat dining room
- Equipment package: \$637,000
- Peak meal volume: 250

The dining center at this Continuing Care Retirement Community focuses on whole-person wellness of residents, staff and visitors as the core for its design. Healthy eating options and opportunities for socializing were an important part of the menu.

University of North Dakota Wilkerson Commons

- Grand Forks, North Dakota
- Opening date: September 2015
- Project size: 45,400 sq ft
- Peak meal volume: 1,600
- Equipment package: \$4,054,081
- Scope of services: foodservice renovation and expansion

This project involved renovation of a two-level residence hall dining center plus an addition of 20,900 sq ft for a 425-seat dining area with smaller dining room for 120 people. The upper level includes a culinary support center featuring cook/chill production while the lower level has a large open gathering/studying area as well as meeting rooms, computer labs, coffee shop, and convenience store. The stone hearth pizza concept provides after-hours service while the rest of the kitchen is closed.

CONSULTANCY FOCUS

the prominent program for its design services. As one of the first foodservice consultant firms to embrace the technology, Carlson led the FCSI Revit Task Force, which published new foodservice industry standards for the implementation of the Revit software.

Management consulting

Three years ago, amid increasing competition among consultants and firms, Carlson made the bold decision to bring on-board Joie Schoonover an operations veteran with more than 30 years of experience in higher education foodservice. A client of Rippe's as the director of dining at the University of Wisconsin-Madison (UW-Madison), Schoonover had called Carlson one day asking for help with management structuring. After referring her to other industry consultants, Carlson realized he would benefit from offering management consulting services. In hiring Schoonover, he subsequently made Rippe Associates more of a "one-stop-shop" for consulting.

No day or project is typical for Schoonover, but could include conducting an assessment of an operation, helping clients with menu development and production or integrating a software system for a facility. She travels regularly, at least two or three times a month, and



once remained on-site with a client for six months to serve as an interim director. "I helped build their systems and integrate their software to document recipes, production methods and other standard operating procedures," Schoonover says. "Systems are definitely my passion."

With experience of running a department that served almost 14,000 meals daily, Schoonover specializes in high-volume production and improving efficiencies. She works across industry segments with projects at UW-Madison as well as at the University of Kansas, Basin Electric Headquarters in Bismarck, North Dakota, and St. Jude Children's Research Hospital in Memphis, among others.

"Things are changing in the consulting community," Carlson says. "We have been able to stay competitive, not just by bringing on Joie, but also in staying true to our values and making sure we have a third generation in place."

Last year, Rippe recruited Darren Peterson, a former client and director of dining at the North Dakota State University, to come on board and receive design training and mentorship from Terry Pellegrino with the intent to take over her studio upon retirement.

"I think there are definitely more opportunities like that with other specialists who might be able to help us," Carlson says, looking toward the future. In the meantime, Rippe will be sticking to its firm equation. Clearly, it works. ■

Top: Salad bar at St David's; dining area at Surly Brewery

Rippe Associates and FCSI

Rippe Associates' principals and team members have been active in FCSI over the years, with many serving on the board and co-chairing committees. "What I enjoy most about FCSI is not only getting to know the manufacturers, but also other consultants," says Mike Wrase, senior project manager and an early ICON committee member. Carlson points to Guyott's approach – "you can sit on the sidelines and complain or get involved and make things better," – in describing the firm's activity. "The more we can do to improve the foodservice industry's opinion of consultants the better for everyone," he says.

Trends and changes in Rippe's top industry segments

Steve Carlson FCSI, president

Gaming/resorts

With a shrinking, Baby Boomer customer base, casinos have looked to foodservice, spas and other resort-like amenities to attract younger customers. That means switching from old-school buffets to food markets or at least branded coffee shops, restaurants or sports bars.

Terry Pellegrino FCSI, principal

Education

At the K-12 level there's an expansion from simple cafeterias to more scratch cooking and variety. K-12 schools are the largest users of combi-ovens, but they are also investing in tilting skillets to make a wider variety of food. At college level, the key focus is sustainability and authenticity. Equipment selections are based on energy consumption. Kitchens also need to be set up with some separation to prepare allergen-friendly meals.

Connie Dickson FCSI, principal

B&I

More companies are viewing their dining area as a "third space," for employees who might want to get away from their desk or grab a healthy snack or coffee. There's also a stronger focus on healthy menu development. Equipment, has to remain very flexible as menu offerings change.

Healthcare and senior living

Taking care of staff and visitors, in addition to patients, is the new focus for many healthcare facilities. Hospitals want to help patients improve their food and life choices to avoid repeat visits. Meal kits tailored to specific diets and meetings with the dietitian are driving this effort.

