

Memories and Milestones

Sidney O. Dewberry, PE, LS
Founder and Chairman

I have a confession to make. I've spent every minute of the last fifty years with this firm, but I am as awed as anyone by what we've accomplished.

From our first tiny headquarters in a one-room office in the Broyhill Building on Lee Highway in Arlington, Virginia, we've grown into a national firm composed of 30 offices, more than 1,800 people, and annual billings in excess of \$220 million. Our clients and our projects both number in the thousands. As we mark our 50th anniversary, I can't help but be tremendously gratified.


The journey
is the reward.

TAOIST SAYING

But statistics are only part of the story. Ours is a business in which a great deal of what we do has a visible and tangible impact on the world. I love driving past the places that our firm has had a hand in creating. Conference centers. Housing developments. Lakes. Golf courses. Libraries. Churches. Bridges. Roads. Telecommunications facilities. Small or large, they're all something to be proud of. Such landmarks also provide a satisfying reminder: When it comes to measuring the land, reshaping it, getting across it or building on it, Dewberry has done it—and done it well—for a half century.

Of course, there are some aspects of our business that are not immediately visible to the eye. The roots of Dewberry are in the closely-allied arenas of surveying and planning, both of which leave their mark, but more subtly than a built structure does. I can assure you that the two activities have come light years from what they were when I started out in 1956!

Today, planning entails analysis of myriad factors, from demographics to economics to politics, at a level of precision and sophistication that was unheard of a generation ago. As for surveying, long gone are the days of rod-and-plat measurement. We now harness high-powered technology to measure, record, assess, map, image, model, and more. The world of modern data collection, storage, and analysis is both a marvel *and* marvelous.



Talking about the revolution in technology leads me naturally to reflect on the evolution of Dewberry. Not simply in the range of tools we now use, but in the services we offer as well. Fifty years ago, my first partner Jim Nealon would haul a transit out to a job site to gather data. He would drop off the numbers at the office where I was waiting to draw up plans. The work was interesting, straightforward ... but only a hint of what was to come. In the intervening years we've added a host of other services, including architecture, building engineering, design-build, emergency management, environmental consulting, mapping, security, telecommunications, transportation, water, and special services designed to help local, state and federal governments and private sector handle their infrastructure needs. Our original business of land development remains important to us, but it's now complemented by a full range of other offerings.

We've also branched out in terms of geography. Our first projects were all within a proverbial stone's throw of the Beltway around Washington, D.C. Today, Dewberry has offices all over the map, as well as projects that take us around the globe.

I'm not exaggerating when I say that our drive for diversification goes back to the very beginning. Jim Nealon and I went into business during a building recession—one of the periodic jumps in mortgage rates that bring construction to a halt. We had to hustle like crazy to bring in work. Fortunately, the recession didn't last very long, but it gave us a taste for not being too dependent on any one project, any one client, any one line of work.

I can trace my own inclination for diversification back even further, to growing up on a tobacco farm near Hurt, Virginia, in the 1920s and 1930s. In our way, the Dewberry family farm was a highly-diversified operation. Self-sufficiency was decidedly the order of the day. My parents, eight siblings and I grew just about everything we consumed—except the salt and pepper!

Something else that I can trace back to those early days is my love for building things. When I was very young, my dad spent several years supervising a bridge construction crew. If you pass through Altavista today, on old Route 29, you'll drive over one of his bridges. My father died of leukemia when I was nine, but

before I lost him, he used to take me to job sites with him. Those jaunts left a deep impression. By age 14 I knew that I wanted to be an engineer.

Then, like today, education was the ticket. I graduated from Gretna High School in 1945, just in time to sign on for what turned out to be the closing days of World War II. I was too late to ship out overseas, but not too late to be tossed into an intense training program at Virginia Polytechnic Institute (VirginiaTech) in Blacksburg (VA). While I was there, the war came to an end. I still remember the celebration all around town that August day—whooping, yelling, riding in cars up and down the streets ... and, of course, kissing all the girls!




Early photo of Sid Dewberry shortly after start of business.

When my two years in the Army were up, I came back to my hometown with the idea of getting a job so I could buy one of the new cars that were just starting to roll off the assembly lines in Detroit. Mostly, I wanted a break from sitting in a classroom. Big sister Dorothy, however, wouldn't stand for it. If I didn't go to college then, she scolded me, I would probably never go. Before I knew it, the whole family was in on the campaign to get me back in school. I never stood a chance.

Dorothy was right, of course. And I'm grateful that she nagged me, because I ended up graduating from George Washington University in June 1951 with an engineering degree. By then I had a bride to take care of: I married hometown sweetheart Reva Anne Lanier during my senior year at GWU.

I also had a job. My employer was Montgomery County, Maryland—a place that has played a role in my business life ever since. One of my favorite stories relates to that first job. I worked in the County's road department. One day, I joined members of a survey crew to take measurements along Sagamore Road, which was slated to be widened. We pulled up to the site and began unloading our equipment. The property owner suddenly materialized at the top of the embankment overlooking our truck. He was none other than Drew Pearson, one of Washington's best-known—and feistiest—newspaper columnists. We explained that we were there to take measurements for the widening project. "I don't think so," he coolly replied, leaning over to pick up a shotgun near his feet. Naturally, the crew and I beat a hasty retreat and left it to the County's attorney to get things straight with Mr. Pearson. A few weeks later we came back to take the measure-



ments. Pearson was rocking away on his front porch, watching our every move. He never said a word—and there was no shotgun in sight—but you can believe we did our job and got out of there fast!

I'm not sure I appreciated its value at the time, but the episode was a great up-close-and-personal lesson in how near and dear people hold their homes and property. It certainly made a lasting impression on me, because a decade or so later, when I was serving as Chairman of the Arlington County Planning Commission, I was a vocal advocate of soliciting public input about major new projects. In fact, while working on Pentagon City, a large mixed-use project near the Pentagon, I wrote an article about participatory planning that received national attention and helped to make the procedure pretty much standard practice around the country. Here at Dewberry, of course, soliciting public input in the early stages of a project is a hallmark of the way we do business. Development brings huge change with it—much of it good—but one should never forget that with every turn of a spade or roar of a bulldozer individual lives are going to be affected, often profoundly.

Development and change were both definitely the watchwords in the 1950s around cities like Washington, D.C. The post-war baby boom was underway and young families wanted homes in the suburbs. (Reva and I started our own baby boom in 1951, with the birth of Barry, the first of our four children.) The job market was promising for someone with my skills. After a brief stint with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, I had the good luck to work next for Greenhorne & O'Mara, a small firm in Maryland, followed by a job managing the engineering department of Virginia-based M.T. Broyhill, who billed himself at the time as “the world's largest builder of brick homes.”

Broyhill's huge operation was a well-oiled machine. When I joined the firm, he was building about 1500 homes a year. The company handled everything from buying the land to building the houses. He had his own bricklayers, carpenters, plumbers ... even a concrete batching plant.

What Broyhill didn't have, however, was a crystal ball. When mortgage rates spiked in 1955, housing construction slowed to a crawl. So Broyhill went around

to the heads of his departments and offered them a chance to buy their operations. Jim Nealon, another fellow in the engineering department, and I pounced on the chance. One hitch: We needed money. I visited my former employers, Marcus Greenhorne and Jim O'Mara, to see if they might be interested in bankrolling us. The pair had asked me earlier to start a branch office of their firm in Virginia, but I had taken a higher-paying job with Broyhill. Fortunately, the two men liked the idea, and before I knew it, Jim Nealon and I were in business, backed by Greenhorne & O'Mara! On April 13, 1956, we opened our doors.

The rest, as they say, is history—some of which you'll read about in these pages. I should note, however, that we haven't tried to tell the whole story of the firm in this slim book. To do so would take hundreds of pages and thousands of photographs. Not to mention hours to read! Instead, we've put together an elegant "scrapbook" of the firm's evolution during its first five decades. *The Dewberry Way: Celebrating 50 Years of Excellence* is light on prose, heavy on pictures, and designed as much to entertain as to enlighten.

We had several goals in mind when we undertook publication of this book. The most compelling reason had to do with timing: the firm's 50th anniversary on April 13, 2006.

Being in business for a half century is no small feat. For many reasons, most companies don't make it past the first few years. Sometimes the reason is lack of planning. Other times, a lack of passion. As Dewberry heads into its sixth decade, we have plenty to be proud of and a great deal to celebrate—not the least of which is our staying power.

Another goal in putting this history together was to showcase some of our projects. I can assure you it's wasn't easy to decide what to include. In fact, it was close to impossible! How do you choose when you have thousands of choices? Especially when every project, large or small, has contributed to the firm's prosperity? We considered hundreds of projects, sorted through stacks of stunning photographs, and did our best to select a few that illustrate the range of our accomplishments.



Reva Dewberry

Reva Anne Lanier Dewberry...always striving for perfection. At work, as a book-keeper, silent partner, troubleshooter, morale booster. At home, as a wife, mother, providing a soft place to fall for her family.

Right: Sid and Reva aboard the Swanee Reva, 1997.



We made a particular effort to include projects that bear the stamp of the dozen firms we've acquired over the years. These alliances have benefited Dewberry in more ways than I can count. From TOLK in 1982 to PSA in 2004, we've been extremely fortunate to forge permanent bonds with organizations that have brought us new talent, new clients, new offices, and new ideas. A few of the firms we've acquired have histories that go back as far as—or further than—Dewberry's. We can only touch on those unique stories in this brief book, of course, but the process of gathering material for *The Dewberry Way* has given us a rich collection of facts and photos to preserve in our corporate archive.

The Dewberry Way also gives me an opportunity to highlight the values that I think make Dewberry Dewberry. I confess that it's always been difficult for me to put my finger on what makes this firm special. I'm probably too close to be objective. But the firm is special, on that point I have no doubt.

The closest I've come to distilling the firm's essence into words can be found in a short piece titled *The Dewberry Way*, later in the book. We wrestled mightily to get the words just right. I hope you'll recognize in them what you, too, consider the firm's best qualities.

And speaking of best, I've saved for the close of my comments the most important reason for putting together this book. I want to express my gratitude to the many people who have made the past fifty years such a success.

I owe a great debt to my family, starting with my wife, Reva, who has been with me every inch of the long, rewarding journey from our hometown of Hurt, Virginia. Reva kept the books for the firm for the first of our five decades and set us on a course of balancing the books each and every month, right down to the penny—





Sid Dewberry (center)
with his four children, 2006
(left to right):

Michael S. Dewberry,
Secretary; Chairman of the
Audit Committee; Chairman
of the Mergers and Acquis-
itions Committee; member,
Compensation Committee;
Vice-Chairman of the
Executive Committee.

Karen S. GrandPre,
Member of the Board.

Thomas L. Dewberry,
Member of the Board.

Barry K. Dewberry,
former partner, COO and
CEO; now Chairman of the
Executive Committee and
Vice-Chairman of the Board.

his or her own unique way. Without question, my life would be poorer without them. Our grandchildren, too, bring incalculable pleasure.

I also wanted to honor my various partners over the years, particularly those who were instrumental in getting the firm off the ground: Marcus Greenhorne, Jim O'Mara, Jim Nealon and Dick Davis. Each one helped to turn dream into reality.

And where would we be without our clients? From our very first client—my old employer, M.T. Broyhill—to the thousands who have followed over the years, I'm deeply grateful. I'm well aware of the great trust placed in our firm's hands each time a client hires Dewberry. I hope we'll always live up to that trust.

And finally, there are Dewberry's incredible employees. Our firm has been blessed over the years with an abundance of talented and dedicated people who together have built a dynamic, far-flung enterprise that consistently ranks in the top 50 of more than 50,000 peer firms. Simply put, this company would not exist if not for the astonishing energy, intellect, and enthusiasm of hundreds of wonderful team members. You're what make this company GO! To each of you, from the bottom of my heart: *Thank you!*

Sidney O. Dewberry
Founder and Chairman
April 13, 2006

a habit that instilled discipline throughout the organization and kept us on the straight and narrow.

Our four children—Barry, Karen, Mike and Tom—have all been supportive, too, each in