

2015 CIBPA Entrepreneur Award

Growing Stronger

By Bernie Kruchak

In 1989, 24-year-old John Garcea placed a two-line ad in the Winnipeg Free Press classifieds that read, "S&J Concrete Works. Free estimates." It was an unassuming first step in a journey that has seen the once seasonal, small job concrete firm grow into one of Manitoba's premier group of construction companies.

Today, S&J Construction is the flagship of the Garcea Group of Companies, which also includes Granite Concrete Services, Tuscany Construction and Colour Design Decorating. Despite the decades of growth and continuing success, the companies steadfastly remain a family business. Headed by John and his father Salvador (the "S" in S&J), the group of companies also employs many other members of the Garcea famiglia.

"Family is everything," John says. "Over the years, as the company grew, it was important to me to have the family there to grow with me. So, along with my dad, my wife, sons and brothers are also part of the Garcea Group team."

Like many Italian families, this familial bond and determination to achieve success has its roots in the immigration experience. Salvador and Rosa Garcea immigrated to Canada via Argentina. John was three years old when the family arrived in Winnipeg in 1968. After high school, John's entrepreneurial spirit led him to start his own business.

"I knew I wanted to work for myself in construction, but I didn't have as much experience as my dad," John recalls. "So I asked him to become my business partner."



Photo by John Giavedoni, imagine.ca/photography

For the first five years of the business, John and Salvador were kept busy pouring sidewalks and driveways around Winnipeg in the summer and clearing snow during the winter. When the company began to take on more sizeable jobs, John decided to focus his energies on building and sustaining the business.

"I was always aggressive in looking for the next project, and it wasn't long before we were doing bigger jobs and buying more equipment," John recalls. "Over the years, the Garcea name has been associated with breaking ground at some of Manitoba's most high-profile projects. For instance, we've provided excavation, foundation and concrete services for projects such as the MTS Centre, Winnipeg James Armstrong Richardson International Airport, Canadian Museum for Human Rights and Caboto Centre.

As much as an appreciation of family is important to John, so is the sense of community that Winnipeg offers. John says his wife Mabel and their children Salvador, Enrique and Rosie believe in giving back to the Italian community and the city that welcomed the Garceas so many years ago.

"My dad and I established the business through hard work but we also had the support of so many other people over the years. Success provides opportunities to help others, and as a family, we recognize how important it is for us to return the goodwill."

Family and community are common threads through John Garcea's story. There have been plenty of opportunities to open up shop in other Canadian cities, but leaving Winnipeg has never been an option.

"My family's roots are here and I've worked hard to keep our company in pace with the city," John notes. "Winnipeg is a good place to do business, and our customers believe in our work. Like me, we're all proud to call Winnipeg our home."