

## One On One

## Frederic Mulligan

Chairman, Cutler Associates, Worcester

*Cutler Associates Inc., a design construction firm, has its headquarters in Worcester and offices in Allentown, Pa., and Tampa, Fla. The company is designing and constructing a new research and development facility for FLEXcon in Spencer; renovating the Saint-Gobain ceramics and plastics facility in Northborough; renovating the Edward M. Kennedy Community Health Center in Worcester; and is involved in other projects in Lowell, Wellesley, East Providence, R.I., and in Florida. Cutler Associates is the only place Mr. Mulligan has worked professionally. Having met company founder Melvin S. Cutler after graduating from Worcester Polytechnic Institute, Mr. Mulligan went directly into a business and a company that he has spent nearly 40 years nurturing into the thriving firm it is today. Mr. Cutler, said Mr. Mulligan, is as close to family as you can get without being related, and his recent promotion to the role of chairman was part of a strategic leadership transition that has been in the works for most of his tenure.*

**According to your mission, Cutler Associates, as an organization, believes strongly in the team approach. What do you mean by that?**

“What ‘team approach’ really means is that we are a contracting firm that designs and builds facilities, whereas generally projects are delivered as part of an arrangement between architects and builders but they have separate contracts, which sometimes works and often doesn’t. For us, this is a process we enter into together with the goal of giving our clients what they want at a great value.”

**What has changed in your 40-year career span?**

“First of all, the technology. Whereas we used to work in two dimensions first and build from there, we now model digitally in three dimensions and have the computer print out a 2-D image. This allows us to solve problems digitally before we get to the point of having to solve them physically. Second is the attention our clients want us to pay to being environmentally conscious — the old thinking was, ‘Better, cheaper, faster’ and now you can add ‘greener’. But essentially, we are still building with brick and stone and using our hands, just the way it’s always been done — our industry is actually one that evolves very slowly.”



Mr. Mulligan  
(T&G Staff/RICK CINCLAIR)

**How many projects are going on at any one time, and what are some of the biggest challenges in managing them all?**

“Currently, we have 18 projects being worked on, and the biggest challenge is in making each and every client feel like they are the most important one. Even though we work with computers and concrete, so much of our work boils down to people and interpersonal relationships.”

**Cutler Associates recently won an award for the construction of a Turbulence Research Facility — the largest of its kind — in Durham, N.H. What kinds of special consultants did you need to bring in for a project of that magnitude?**

“We were able to find a wind-tunnel expert from Maryland, and it boiled down to teamwork. We know how to do our piece, he knows how to do his piece, and we had to figure out the middle — so the most important thing was listening to each other. But the result was an amazing project where the implications are tremendous, as researchers can begin to study high-velocity turbulence in ways they haven’t been able to before.”

**I understand that Cutler is a philanthropic presence in the Worcester community. Talk to me about the work done under the umbrella of the Melvin S. Cutler Charitable Foundation.**

“Mel grew up a poor kid, and he hasn’t forgotten that. Our annual holiday gift to our employees and affiliates, for as long as I have been here, is the opportunity to help someone else out. We write a check to a charity of their choice and ask them to present it — and this way we reach out to hundreds of different organizations and charities. The best part is taking a look at where people choose to give — it’s very intriguing, and it tells you a little bit about their lives.”

Compiled by correspondent AMANDA ROBERGE