GABE BIFANO:
Running a Family Business

James H. Boyle & Son, Inc.
is performing every type of commercial insulation on the market today

It has been said with some foundation that Sicilians are the most close-knit, family oriented people in the world. And Gabe Bifano of Boston is certainly no exception. His family comes first and all other matters are secondary, even business.

Gabe’s business of course, is James H. Boyle & Son, Inc., a family run operation, with his wife, Sadie, doubling as the Treasurer and Clerk, and his sons, Joseph and Peter, serving as Vice President and Assistant Treasurer, respectively. Assisting Joseph and another Vice President is Mike Sandorse. Mike is also the in-house legal counsel for the firm.

Headed by Gabe, the Bifano clan has managed to elevate their interior contracting business into the six million range. The quality of their work and professionalism is renowned in the North-East area.

Even as a small boy, Gabe was always fascinated with construction. So much so that he could never imagine one day taking over his father’s successful bakery on Charter Street. His parents, who had emigrated to Boston from Sicily at the turn of the century, built their small bakery into a neighborhood favorite. Naturally, they hoped Gabe would follow their lead and push the bakery to greater heights.

But Gabe had other ideas. They all began to come true when he met and married the former Sadie Guidara. The young Boston native started working as an estimator for his father-in-law’s plastering firm, F. Guidara & Son.

In the beginning, it was extremely tough. The country was in the midst of its worst depression and new construction was at a minimum. Working long hours as an estimator during the day and going to school at night, Gabe showed the same drive and ambition that he has exhibited for 43 years in the industry. He learned early in life that to be successful one must work hard and take pride in the quality of his work.

Gabe has had two major turning points in his life.

The first was his marriage.

The second was his teaming up with John Boyle. When Gabe and John became partners in 1941, the James H. Boyle Co., originally founded by John’s father in 1895, had only a half dozen employees.

With Gabe handling all office affairs, and John on the outside, the company grew quickly.

Both men possessed a keen eye for the future trends of the industry and their company was ‘one of the first firms to enter the drywall field.

Gabe and John didn’t stop there. They continued to diversify until their credits included demountable (Continued on Page 23)
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partitions, light steel framing, fireproofing, insulation and painting.

Finally in 1959, they incorporated to become James H. Boyle & Son, Inc.

In 1964, Gabe lost his long time friend and partner but relief once again came from within for soon Gabe's own son, Joe, began working for the firm. Peter, another son, followed several years later.

The two brothers now play a major role in the firm's daily business operation. Gabe still has his hands firmly on the reins, but he delegates responsibility and authority with increasing regularity.

When Construction Dimensions found Gabe Bifano, he was busy completing several bids which had to go out that afternoon. But he did manage to sit down for about an hour to discuss with us some matters he thought important to the wall and ceiling industry.

DIMENSIONS: Gabe, it has been said that as the cost of energy continues to rise, construction in the northeast continues to decline. Do you see a stopping point or a solution to this problem?

BIFANO: Of course, we are all aware of the problem and volume has dropped off since the energy crunch. However, we have great faith that business will return possibly not to its former state—but at least to where it is stable and steady.

We are seeing some evidence of this now. Industry realizes that there are several advantages the northeast offers over other areas.

DIMENSIONS: The energy crisis has hurt construction. But are there any areas in which it has spurred new, possibly different construction?

BIFANO: Yes, I would say mainly in two areas, solar heating and increasing emphasis on insulation. Five years ago, insulation was a luxury item. Now it’s a necessity.

DIMENSIONS: Does this mean you are stressing insulation more than you were in the past?

BIFANO: Our company is performing every type of commercial insulation on the market today. We realize the need and we are continually studying new (products), applications and technical information.

But you must remember the average wall and ceiling contractor doesn’t actually understand what insulation really is. What was proper insulation five years ago, no longer applies today. They used to talk about 4 inches on the ceiling, now they’re talking 12 inches.

DIMENSIONS: Does your involvement in this field only include new construction?

BIFANO: Not at all. Probably 90% of the existing buildings in this country are poorly insulated. And if we really want to save energy this is where we should begin.

One way to achieve this is by retrofitting the old buildings and homes. Instead of having to rip the guts out of a building or remove partitions to expose the numbers you merely bore into the partitions and inject foam insulation.

We are even beginning to advertise for this type of work. We certainly have been bidding a lot of it. You see the expenses for the operation can be recouped by the owner.

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in energy saving in only 2 or 3 years.

**DIMENSIONS:** President Carter has made it obvious that the administration is very concerned about proper insulation. Do you foresee the government intervening as they so often do.

**BIFANO:** They probably will. I see government intervention coming in one of two ways. Fines for poor or improper insulation or rewards for using sufficient insulation, or possibly a combination of the two.

A tax break for the owner is one way of rewarding. Or the government could pick up part of the tab for the insulation as another. This could apply to the building complex owner or the average home-owner.

**DIMENSIONS:** Gabe, as a completely union contractor do you have any special complications?

**BIFANO:** Our biggest problem is labor and its unions. They have got to learn to work with industry rather than against it.

In my opinion, labor still has the same working rules that they had 50 to 60 years ago, in the horse and buggy days. They have got to learn to trim some of the fat off.

For example, almost everyone who drives to work doesn’t get paid for mileage. They don’t get paid for traveling time. They don’t get paid for a lot of things. They get paid for working and this is what I would like to see the unions return to.

I believe its the unions’ responsibility since we are union contractors, to supply labor wherever our jobs are. We believe it’s unfair for the simple reason that we could hire local people and not have to pay the same wages otherwise.

**DIMENSIONS:** Any other problem areas?

**BIFANO:** Probably, just as great as the other two, is the tremendous pressure and competition we are feeling from the non-union contractor.

Almost all housing done now in the north east is being built by non-union contractors. And yet the people that they hire are the same people that we hire. They are union people, but because jobs are short, they are working on non-union sites.

So the non-union contractors are getting the advantage of our labor, but not at our price.

**DIMENSIONS:** Do you mean the non-union contractors are not restricted to the same wage scale as you are?

**BIFANO:** Not necessarily less wages, but the rules are not the same. They are more relaxed—no coffee breaks in the morning and in the afternoon.

The jurisdictional problems that we experience do not apply to non-union contractors when a load of lumber comes onto a non-union site, a laborer can unload it. But if this same truck comes onto a union site the carpenters say—we must unload the wood because it is a finish material. So right there it has cost us more to unload the same truck.

**DIMENSIONS:** Have you ever considered the possibility of becoming non-union yourself, or at least a double-breasted operation?

**BIFANO:** We have explored the possibility but it is not as easy for us as many might believe.

In many ways its like a man that has walked with a crutch all his life—taking that crutch away—he might walk better than ever or then again he might fall flat on his face.

Basically, I am not trying to condemn the unions. After all they have been our livelihood since the very beginning. All I am asking is that we attempt to compliment and help one another a little more than we are at present. And we should because we both want the same thing—work and jobs.

**DIMENSIONS:** Gabe, after being in the business for 43 years is there ever a time where you wish you could just return to the simple, less complicated days.

**BIFANO:** Not at all. I enjoy my work just as much now as I ever have, and I am very optimistic about the future of the industry.