

# Michael Riesz and Co. – 100 Years Strong

*By Leigh-Ann Brannigan, Membership Manager*

*New Brunswick Theological Seminary at College Avenue and Seminary Place in New Brunswick, NJ, built by Michael Riesz and Co. and dedicated in 2014.*

**H**ow does a company thrive for a century? Bookended by two pandemics, encasing a century of wars, suffering through a Great Depression and a Great Recession, reckoning with social change and social strife and more technological change than in any other century before...

We asked ACCNJ Board of Trustees Vice Chairman Eric Jensen to describe for us the 100 years of Michael Riesz and Co., and he advised us the company is “100 years STRONG.”

“The company has evolved,” Eric explains. “And maybe that’s really the key – we started out focused on the public sector, and soon recognized and took hold of other opportunities, so today we have a diverse marketplace. This diversity has made Michael Riesz and Co. resilient and strong enough to weather the economic cycles.”



*Children's Specialized Hospital in New Brunswick is reflective of Michael Riesz and Co.'s presence in the healthcare market in New Jersey.*

### **A Legacy of (Family-Style) Discipline and Integrity**

Eric and his brother Chris are the fourth generation to run the company, founded in Perth Amboy in 1921 by their great-grandfather, Michael Riesz. Michael's daughter, Sophie Riesz Jensen, and her husband Einar Jensen succeeded to the management of the firm, followed by her sons, Michael and Richard Jensen. Eric and Chris are Michael's sons. The consistency in management by the family helped keep the company stable through the decades, says Eric.

He also credits the firm's disciplined approach to managing projects and the overall business, which focuses first on customer satisfaction. Such a focus has led to exceptional performance, which in turn has provided Michael Riesz and Co. with a strong and ongoing base of customer referrals.

“The real foundation of our operation is integrity and honesty,” Eric muses. “We cultivate a team approach inside the company, which makes each of us responsible for our work, each other and, ultimately, the success of the company. We carry over that team approach to the union craftworkers we employ, our subcontractors and all our other partners in the industry.”

### **Evolution and Reward**

The company's original marketplace was the public sector, particularly schools. Through the decades, Michael Riesz and Co. built a reputation for excellence and expertise in healthcare and telecommunications. Today, the firm maintains a large presence in the healthcare sector. But there is still an emphasis on higher education (both private and public), telecommunications, public buildings and design-build.



*New Brunswick Theological Seminary Chapel, notable from outside with its octagonal tower, features a magnificent vaulted ceiling inside that overlooks a space of worship dedicated to “diverse and anti-racist Christian learning.”*

“We really are fortunate to have found such variety in referrals from our customers,” says Eric. “Because of them, we have been able to develop a diverse group of clients. We’re always looking to grow with clients that have specific requirements and challenges we can help meet.”

Some of the most rewarding work has been for Children’s Specialized Hospital in New Brunswick (Middlesex County), New Jersey. During the past 20 years, Michael Riesz and Co. has completed many projects at the hospital.

“To be a part of building a facility for such an outstanding organization, one that is dedicated to helping children, is truly the most rewarding,” he relates.

And some of the most exciting work has been in the works for 75 years, projects for New Jersey Bell, that became Bell Atlantic, that became Bell Atlantic Mobile and now Verizon.

“It’s been quite an experience,” Eric says with a smile. “Seeing the evolution of the telecommunications industry has been remarkable, and

for Michael Riesz and Co. to continue to provide the services these companies require for such an impressive span of time has been very rewarding as well.”

### **The Team: Labor and Management Together**

In Michael Riesz and Co.’s contemporary corporate office, now located in Fords (Woodbridge Township, Middlesex County), eight team members work together.

Most years, the firm employs 25 craftworkers, including superintendents, foremen, journeyworkers and apprentices. Eric is pleased with the relationships forged with union labor for many years.

*The workforce that participates on our projects are “Team Members” and we all have a moral obligation to make sure all of these workers are safe and protected by a safe work environment.*

“We have been very happy with the skilled workforce available to us,” he affirms. “Being able to establish a consistent union workforce that is part of your team is invaluable. We have employed many apprentices over the years. The two now working for us are conscientious, hardworking and want to learn. They are also both veterans. We are proud to have them on our team.”

With the pride comes tremendous responsibility to keep the workforce safe, Eric is quick to add.

“The workforce that participates on our projects are “Team Members” and we all have a moral obligation to make sure all of these workers are safe and protected by a safe work environment,” he emphasizes.



*Verizon in Branchburg, NJ, stands at the front of a long history in telecommunications for Michael Riesz and Co., beginning with New Jersey Bell and marking each phase of the illustrious Bell story in New Jersey.*

# Member Profile

“This approach is also a requirement for all the clients for whom we work. It protects the financial interests of all project participants and – it is the RIGHT THING TO DO!”

## Meeting Challenges with Support from ACCNJ

The biggest challenge for Michael Riesz today, says Eric, is obtaining and maintaining a steady level of work with quality clients at reasonable pricing. To accomplish that in an ever-changing industry requires always looking to improve corporate processes and approaches that allow you to remain competitive. “It is just as important to look ahead as it is to look at your history,” he states.

In his view, compounding the company’s challenge is the industry challenge.



*Cordish Family Pavilion, completed by Michael Riesz and Co. in 2011, is the centerpiece of Princeton University's Lenz Tennis Center. The upper of two stories holds a viewing deck and coaches' offices; the lower level houses locker rooms.*

*Eric stresses the ever-increasing pace of technology as the driver for construction... He warns all construction contractors to embrace the pace...*

“For our industry today,” he explains, “the most critical issue we see in New Jersey is the ability of project sponsors to finance the growth we all need. The State will be limited in its ability to drive growth for our industry. Alternative methods such as PPP, an initiative driven by ACCNJ, are necessary alternative project delivery methods that need to continue.”

Eric is currently Vice Chair of the ACCNJ and gives generously of his time to the Association, working on those issues and others. But dedication and support of the Association didn't start with Eric. His father, Michael Jensen, was President of Building Contractors Association of New Jersey, a management trustee on many of the trades' fringe benefit funds, and an avid voice, respected leader and icon in the construction industry.

Eric sees ACCNJ as “an invaluable resource” for members of the construction industry in New Jersey.

“From labor relations to governmental policy to safety to a wide variety of industry-specific issues, ACCNJ is an advocate for our members,” Eric elucidates. “The Association has grown in strength and depth with the merger of the Heavy and Highway Contractors and the Building Contractors. Our members represent the largest and most highly qualified contractors in the State and, along with the outstanding staff of ACCNJ, are contributing to making our industry safer, more productive and a critical part of our State's economy.”



*Rutgers, The State University, and Michael Riesz and Co. have partnered in many projects over the years. The Rutgers Lifelong Learning Center in Egg Harbor and the Welcome Visitors Center in Piscataway are two well-known campus buildings.*

## Building the Future on the Past

When asked his projections for the future of the construction industry, Eric stresses the ever-increasing pace of technology as the driver for construction and all industries. He warns all construction contractors to embrace the pace so they may continue to deliver projects in the most efficient manner possible with the highest level of quality.

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And for his family-owned company? A recognition of the past...pride in the history of employing skilled craftworkers, working with conscientious subcontractors, collaborating with talented architects and partnering with strong project owners that have played a vital role in New Jersey's economy for the last 100 years.

"The future for Michael Riesz and Co. is all about building on the first 100 years," declares Eric. "We have created a solid foundation and we will leverage this history of integrity, innovation and excellence to build our team and serve our clients...for the next hundred years to come."

### Ukrainian Catholic Church, Perth Amboy Builder: Michael Riesz and Co.

The majestic edifice that is the Ukrainian Catholic Church of the Assumption in Perth Amboy, built by Michael Riesz and Co. in the late 1940s and completed in 1952, reflected the strength of the church community during the 1950s and 1960s. Economic prosperity, the baby boom of post-WWII, a new wave of Ukrainian immigrants and a group of progressive pastors all led the parish to "its peak of progress, influence and membership," reads the church website. Today, the church is just as gracious and welcoming as when it first opened its doors nearly 70 years ago.



## Four Decades of School Construction

1927  
Keyport High School



Circa 1930  
Westfield School

1950  
Cook School  
Plainfield



Circa 1958  
Aerial shot of Iselin  
Middle School

1963  
Tamaques School  
Westfield



1964  
Mother Seton High School  
Clark