

Education, communication and integrity

Jim Wheatley of McKeon Group finally decides to call it a day

After 47 years in the industry, Jim Wheatley of McKeon Group has decided to step down and enjoy his retirement. Widely-known and respected both within McKeon Group and the industry at large, Jim is a keen advocate for continuous education, upskilling and mentoring. More than anything else he believes that clear and honest communication is key to all successful business relationships.



In looking back over the past five decades Jim's career fully reflects these values. He entered the industry in 1977 on a plumbing apprenticeship with Guinness Brewery in St James Gate, Dublin. While with Guinness, he successfully completed his trade examinations and the Institute of Domestic Heating Engineering (IDHE) Diploma course in Bolton St College of Technology.

Following his apprenticeship in the brewery, Jim spent two years with a general plumbing contractor on residential and light commercial/ industrial installations. He also had a 6-month spell on contract with Team Aer Lingus at Dublin airport.

Throughout this time, he completed the City & Guilds of London Advanced Craft Certificate in Plumbing, again delivered by Bolton Street College of Technology.

In 1984, Jim returned to Guinness Brewery on direct contract for three years to work on new brewing and storehouse upgrades taking place at

St James Gate. While there, he continued his evening studies in Bolton Street College, obtaining the Craft Engineering Technicians Certificate in 1987.

Jim joined Ashbrook Engineering Ltd in 1988 as project engineer/ estimator and advanced to Senior Contracts Manager within four years. He remained with Ashbrook Engineering for over 23 years and successfully managed contracts in the educational, commercial, leisure, industrial



Tomás McKeon, Managing Director, McKeon Group, pictured with Jim Wheatley during his retirement send-off at the Group's Ashbourne Headquarters.

process, hospital and healthcare sectors. Personal key clients included Bank of Ireland, University College Dublin, Unilever, OPW, Atlantic Industries (Coca Cola), the Department of Education & Science, among many others.

He played an integral part in the successful organisational development of the company for 23 years and was responsible for developing and implementing the systems and procedures to ensure the efficient operation of the contracting process. He was also responsible at senior management level for the safety, health and welfare of all personnel affected by the company's operations.

As always, the continuous education was going on in the background. Between 1995 and 1997 he obtained the UCD Certificate in Safety Health and Welfare at Work, the Construction Safety Management (MSIC) from the CIF and obtained an Honours Degree in Business Management from the Irish Management Institute in 2007.

Jim joined McKeon Group in 2011 to start up a new mechanical services division within this well-established construction company based in Swords and Ashbourne. He joined as Mechanical Division Manager, advancing to Mechanical Services Director and finally Group Technical Director.

He established the mechanical division in McKeon Group as a



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premier provider of full mechanical services within the wider Leinster region. With clients such as the OPW, UCD, HSE and many others, they carried out several prestigious projects in some of the most iconic buildings in the country. They became a trusted provider of mechanical services for many critical state facilities including the Prison Service, Revenue, the Department of Foreign Affairs, Áras an Úachtaráin and Dublin Castle.

Nor did he neglect his continuing education throughout his time with McKeon Group. He studied for, and achieved a Professional Diploma in Contract Law and Arbitration at the Sutherland School of Law in UCD in 2019.

Over nearly 13 years with McKeon Group, Jim played a key role in the modernisation and development of the company. It is now a diverse, multi-functional operation, encompassing general construction with M&E, smart building technology, master systems integration and related software development.

Building Services Engineering caught up with Jim recently and, in relaying the history of his involvement in the industry, he also gave some personal

observations based on experience down through the years. "I am a keen advocate for life-long study to facilitate an extended career in this industry. It allows you to be relevant to the ever-changing marketplace and to keep informed of the new technologies, methods and systems that are always emerging in our sector.

"Good communication is the key to all our business practises, while honesty and clarity in all our dealings will stand you in good stead for a long career in construction. Clients always appreciate

the truth, and it is critical to the successful delivery of projects to manage clients' expectations at each and every stage of the project process. The partnership and collaborative approach is the best way to achieve best outcomes for all.

"New entrants to our industry need to be encouraged, mentored and helped to find their feet at the early stages of their careers. This industry suffers from cyclical fall-offs in student enrolment due to periodic economic downturns and this, in turn, feeds into down-the-line recruitment problems with a lack of engineers, professionals and trades people. We need to constantly promote recruitment to the industry at every level, particularly so when there is an economic downturn. This recruitment drive requires joined-up thinking between government agencies, employers, the industry associations and professional bodies."

Engaging with Jim is inspiring, while the points he makes with regard to career development and client engagement are all the more credible in that he has done it all. In wishing you well Jim in your retirement, *Building Services Engineering* also hopes that your experience, knowledge and wisdom will still be accessible to those who seek it. ■



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