# Creating Connections

Through his 30+ years at Rich & Associates, Matt Jobin has emphasized collaboration to handle challenges as the parking-structure business evolves

— Craig A. Shutt

*Matt Jobin, AIA*

*The Z, a 10-story, 1,282-car parking structure creates a "parking experience" for users of a nearby mixed-use building designed to revitalize the district. The precast concrete façade features trapezoid-shaped spandrels that create large, dimensional windows along its length and horizontal openings that band the structure. All photos: Rich & Associates.*

Over the 33 years Matt Jobin has designed parking structures at Rich & Associates, he's seen an evolution in design that addresses the facilities' purpose, function, and aesthetics. Adapting to owners' needs and collaborating with teammates has kept him challenged and looking forward to the next project.

"I really like the smaller size of our firm and being able to directly work with clients and develop a relationship with other architects and contractors as we create the projects," he says. "It produces a close atmosphere and great collaborations."

Jobin began working at Southfield, Mich.-based Rich & Associates, which specializes in parking structures, in 1983 after graduating from nearby Lawrence Technological University. Even before he had acquired a job, he'd made a connection. He applied for an internship and discovered that the interviewer went to his high school. "We had an immediate rapport, and I decided to start out here. I've been here ever since."

He began with basic duties, such as doing study maps, feasibility studies, and redlining changes on construction plans. Little by little, he worked up to managing projects and now serves as an associate and senior project manager.

## Parking Evolutions

Through the years, he's seen parking-structure concepts evolve. "Early on, owners wanted us to design vanilla boxes and pack in as many parking spaces as possible. But the trend over the last 15 years or so has put more focus on architectural design and aesthetic needs, especially for projects in downtown areas or connected to a campus or other buildings. It's been a great change."

Owners have seen how the appearance of the project can impact users' impressions of the facility, which typically is the first and last interaction they have on their trip. "We've been able to incorporate brick and try other creative exterior materials to integrate these otherwise utilitarian buildings into the urban fabric. Inside, we are also now including similar upgrades to architectural finishes and adding decorative touches. But owners still demand a well-functioning parking structure for both vehicular and pedestrian traffic flow."

A prime example of the aesthetic treatments being provided is The Z, a 10-story property in Detroit, Mich., tasked with revitalizing the city's historic Broadway district. The 1,282-car, parking structure creates a "parking experience" for users. The precast concrete façade became a key element of the design, featuring trapezoid-shaped spandrels that create large, dimensional windows and horizontal openings that band the structure. It won the 2014 award for Best Parking Structure in PCI's Design Awards competition.

The project also features several amenities that add to the user experience, Jobin notes. "A lot of custom amenities have been provided to really boost the experience." These include the installation of artwork on the interior and along the public-alley façades and vehicle window-washing stations.

## Boosting Amenities

Owners are looking to boost amenities, especially first-floor retail spaces. "Municipalities in particular want more activity around their parking facilities, and they're creating retail and other amenities that allow pedestrians to interact with the space. They're adding bike racks, public washrooms, recycling containers, and other amenities. They consider the buildings to be public utilities and want to add services."

*The Old Town Parking Structure in Traverse City, Mich., features a variety of sustainable-design concepts generated from public design charrettes. These include a green roof over a portion of the roof-level parking and atop the stair towers, charging stations for electric vehicles, solar panels to generate electricity, and a snow-melt system.*

The notion of being a good public steward has extended to environmental concerns, he notes. Projects are more often following LEED criteria, even if they aren't registered, and adding charging stations for electrical cars and using recycled materials. Environmental concerns played a key role in the Old Town Parking Structure created for the City of Traverse City, Mich.

Rich & Associates led the design team of local consultants for the 510-car building, which provided much-needed general parking in the downtown area as well as monthly spaces for a local insurance company. Several public design charrettes generated suggestions for amenities to aid the environment. These included a green roof on a portion of the roof-level parking and atop the stair towers, solar panels to generate electrical power, built-in snow-melt systems, bike racks, and public washrooms. The project received a Silver LEED rating.

**Adding Durability**

Alongside more interest in environmental concerns is more awareness of the need to boost durability and resistance to corrosion, especially in northern climates where a lot of deicing salts are used. "Developers are retaining ownership of garages longer now," he explains. "Before, they kept them three to five years and weren't interested in investing to ensure the building retained its durability for the long haul. Now they're keenly aware of the need to maintain them for as long as possible."

Precast concrete inherently provides a high-quality, durable system due to its low water-to-cementitous ratio, high strength, low porosity, and being manufactured with a high degree of quality control. However, we see the addition of corrosion inhibitors, epoxy rebar, concrete sealers, and other durability enhancers to even further increase the service life, and reduce life-cycle costs. Rich & Associates also advocates a maintenance program to owners. "They often don't realize what they need to do," he says. "We want to give them the tools and educate them on the basics so they make the best decisions."

Too many owners ask about using de-icing agents and other upgraded features but don't bother washing down the floors at winter's end. "It baffles me, because that's the easiest, cheapest, and most effective step in maintaining a garage's longevity," he says. "Removing the corrosive de-icing salts needs to be the first line of defense in the battle to get a parking structure to last."

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To raise awareness, the company provides a custom maintenance manual for each project. They include steps to take each year for each area. It also provides a list of products used, warranty lengths, and suppliers' contact information. "It's a real tool to allow them to reach out and get the support they need."

The manual evolved from the firm's own experience in owning and operating parking structures. MEDPark Inc., the company's development and management arm, has provided financing, development, and parking management for more

*The Campus Martius One parking structure in Detroit, Mich., was value-engineered from cast-in-place to precast concrete to provide a more efficient design. The nine-story, 2,100-car structure features a façade clad with Mankato limestone to match a nearby office building and 16,000 square feet of ground-floor retail space.*

*Rich & Associates provided parking consulting and architectural design services for the Erato Street Cruise Terminal Garage at the Port of New Orleans. The precast concrete structure combines 107,000 square feet of terminal space on the first two levels and 1,020 parking spaces on the four levels above. An exterior, single two-way spiral ramp provides easy access while an internal ramp connects the parking floors.*

than 30 years. "We learned from our experience what works to prevent structure deterioration and the timing for inspections." he explains, "Materials such as caulking and expansion joints are critical components for maintaining structure longevity."

Precast concrete projects account for about 70% of the firm's designs. "Precast has been a very cost-effective, versatile, and durable structural system for parking structures," he says. "One of the advantages of a complete precast structural system is that the exterior structural members can serve as the architectural façade and can be fabricated with an infinite number of architectural finishes."

## Design-Build Grows

Rich & Associates has become more involved in all aspects of projects as design-build delivery methods have grown. "We find the method works very effectively for many clients. Bringing on the precaster and subcontractors early to work through issues and get an early precast bid package put together makes a big difference in the overall project schedule."

They've also seen the tables reversed, with developers contacting precasters they've worked with previously to lead the project. Several recent projects have begun that way, he says. "Owners assume the precaster can do all the design work, and that's not generally the case. The proper functional design is still a critical component. We have worked directly for the precaster as the designer of record in a role that works well in these situations."

Rich & Associates keeps its designs simple, he notes, incorporating accessibility and other features that owners don't always consider. "We need to be sure there's adequate queuing space and ramping capacity to handle the types of users." In one recent case, Jobin talked the owner into adding a second ramp because capacity was so high and the structure often served event-driven groups that would leave simultaneously.

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"We have to sell owners on the value of adding efficiency and providing functional aspects that allow users to enter and exit quickly rather than put in more spaces," he says. "They don't always consider those aspects."

Their role as consultant gives them opportunities to value-engineer projects. That aided the construction of the Campus Martius One project in Detroit, a nine-story, 2,100-space structure. It was redesigned from cast-in-place concrete to precast concrete to make it more efficient and cost effective. That change also allowed for the creation of a Mankato limestone-like finish that matched the adjacent office building. It was constructed over an operating, elevated Detroit People Mover station and track. The structure has two below-grade levels that connect to parking beneath the office building.

## Intermodal Projects Growing

Intermodal projects have been a continuing area of focus for the firm as well. Recent projects have included the Erato Street Cruise Terminal Garage at the Port of New Orleans, La., the West Virginia University Intermodal Garage in Morgantown, W.Va., the Massport Logan Express Parking Garage in Framingham, Mass., and the Cherry Street Transit Parking Structure in Terre Haute, Ind. (for more on this final project, see the article in this issue.)

"Intermodal parking structures have become very popular in the last 15 years in an effort to improve mobility and decrease emissions," Jobin says. "Combining auto parking with different modes of transportation is the basis of these facilities. Additional amenities are typical, including ticketing, waiting rooms, commercial spaces, and bicycle storage."

The variety of projects brings Jobin into contact with a range of clients, designers, and contractors. Those one-to-one skills have also been put to use in the local community, such as in a mentoring program with his alma mater, where he occasionally works with senior engineering students on their school projects, offering advice and reviewing progress.

It's one more way that Jobin uses his interactions to produce better projects and make new connections. "Parking structures are a niche market, but I enjoy the challenge of working with other architects and clients and going through the process, from design to construction. Meeting with clients and the design team is very enjoyable, and I want to share that with others."

There may even come a day when he's interviewing candidates for internships and runs across someone from his old high school who would be the perfect fit for the company.