



## Steering the firm through sea changes

*CEO James Goff took the helm at Landsman Development last summer*

By MARY STONE

The poster-size photograph of La Jument lighthouse hanging behind James Goff's desk is a symbol for him as the CEO of Landsman Development Corp.

Taken in France, the photo is renowned for the lighthouse keeper who escapes inside, seconds before a series of high-rise waves around him deluge the top deck. An aerial photographer captures the moment in a series of seven photos.

For Goff, 54, the waves represent the events of life that sometimes overwhelm us. Like the lighthouse keeper, Goff has learned to hang on tight and enjoy the view.

That attitude is what made building Bausch & Lomb Inc.'s 20-story tower in the 1990s—amidst a storm of pessimism—the happiest time of his life.

A decade later and at the helm of Landsman he still has a blast building things and overcoming the inherent challenges to doing it.

Since founder and president Elliott Landsman relinquished the CEO role last summer, Goff has expanded on the work he started in 2001, when he joined the firm following a 23-year career at Bausch & Lomb.

His focus has been on refining the company's sustainability, an oft-overlooked aspect of business, he says. People want to

hear about growth, but underneath any sustainable growth is a committed and optimized core. Goff says Landsman Development has that now.

Landsman ranked third in the Rochester Business Journal's most recent list of real estate developers with nearly 3 million square feet of non-residential property, most of which the company also manages.

Although the privately held firm does not disclose its revenues, Goff says Landsman's profits grew 33 percent from 2005 to 2006. He expects similar growth this year.

Landsman employs 150 staffers, a comfortable employment level to take on new projects without adding to its corporate base, Goff says.

"Obviously if we took on a 300-unit project we would staff it, so we would grow that way from a people perspective, but we wouldn't have to restaff or upgrade the corporate staff of accounting and finances, human resources and all those things. We think we can grow a fair amount without doing any more to the corporate structure," Goff says.

Landsman is the parent company for Mayzon Corp., which manages Landsman's properties and also operates as a third-party management company, and Mayzon Building Services Group Inc.,

### CLOSE-UP

#### James Goff

**Position:** CEO, Landsman Development Corp.

**Age:** 54

**Family:** Wife, Marianne; twins, Kathryn and Brian, 15

**Education:** B.A. in biology, College of Steubenville, Ohio, 1974; M.S. in safety management, West Virginia University, Morgantown, 1977; MBA, Rochester Institute of Technology, 1991

**Residence:** Webster

**Interests:** Boating, golfing, skiing, traveling, hockey

**Quote:** "When you watch your wife or your mother go through illness, I think it gives you a little more intestinal fortitude to do the things you need to do in life to get through it. The little things don't seem quite so monumental as they might otherwise seem."

which serves as the construction arm of Landsman and as an independent construction firm.

"BSG does about half its work for the parent company and Mayzon, and the oth-

er half of it is like any other construction company,” Goff explains. “They go out and bid, get jobs totally on their own.

“There is diverseness to their portfolio, which is good because it’s a healthy mix, but it’s nice to have the internal capability of going out and quoting jobs, knowing that we can get the work done, get the construction done, build interiors of office buildings or whatever it is we’re constructing.”

Landsman was started in the 1970s as a family company.

“This company made its mark in the real estate market in the ’70s, ’80s and ’90s when there was a lot of inflation and a lot of good strategic moves that Elliott made,” Goff says.

Since then rising costs have affected nearly every aspect of the construction business, including supplies, equipment, salaries and benefits, which Goff says has fueled his focus on finding efficiencies. The waning local economy, he adds, made that push imperative.

“I came to the company when there was no inflation. Rents were stagnant, if not declining. Rather than writing leases that had automatic annual escalators based on a consumer price index or some sort of index, we were writing leases that were fixed for five years in some cases,” Goff says.

“It was a very different animal in terms of the economic times when my tenure began at the company. And we had to grow up as a company and become much more efficient, much more business-like, much more creative in how we conduct our business and where we find low-hanging fruit to find the savings to offset the increases on all of our costs,” he explains.

## Company changes

The transition under Goff’s leadership, which included new team members, was difficult but necessary, he says, and involved employees who left the firm over the past several years.

“There were some people at the company that were not the right fit, and as the company was growing up and becoming a little more sophisticated, some of the employees did not want to grow in that direction and have since left,” Goff says.

The departures were from all levels of the company, from division managers to field personnel, Goff says. As a result, the company has made staffing changes from the company’s top management through every division and every level of the company.

“We believe that in every case the company’s values and core competencies were simply not a good match for the person that was here,” Goff says.

“That has been traumatic for the people that stayed because some of these employees were long-term employees and terrific people. And as the company changed, the fit just didn’t continue to be right. It’s not a knock on the people, it’s just something that evolved. And that’s been a struggle for the people who stayed as well as for the people who left,” he says.

Goff describes the new team as energetic, brilliant and focused on sustainability.

“There are a lot of companies that are failing, cutting back on wages and benefits. General Motors has taken away their 401(k)

program and they’re reducing benefits, and here we are this little company in Rochester, N.Y., and we’re not doing any of that,” Goff says. “I think it’s because we’re running our company more efficiently, and that’s the real change between the older regime here and the newer regime.”

Throughout the leadership transition, Peter Schiller of Peter J. Schiller Corp. says Goff has shown a great deal of sensitivity and tact, which is not easy for a company so firmly rooted in its founder’s reputation.

“From what I understand, just about every new hire that comes into the company, (Goff) interviews personally. He tries to make sure they’re a fit for the Landsman family,” Schiller says. “When need be, when he has to make a hard decision, he’ll make a hard decision.”

Many of the company’s efficiencies come from the buying power Landsman now wields. The company has consolidated its procurement across operations and standardized its requirements from vendors, who Goff says have to share Landsman’s commitment to value. That has meant reducing the number of its vendors.

“It’s not good enough to be less expensive if I can’t get your product on time and you can’t find a way to deliver it. We are trying really hard to be the kinder, gentler real estate company in the region, and that means it’s all about honor, integrity and ethics, and that’s really what Elliott Landsman started this company on, was this foundation, and we will continue that,” Goff says.

“The people that we want to deal with, the customers that we want to service us are all going to be aligned in that fashion. And if they don’t line up that way then there’s

no relationship to have.”

Landsman recently hired a procurement manager who looks for the right contracts and the right vendors. Colleen Regan works with vendors that often offer a wider range of services or products than before, Goff explains. The company also has defined a set of requirements for the subcontractors it hires to ensure they all have the proper insurance.

He advocates sustainability inside and outside the organization. Most of Landsman’s construction and maintenance work is done with that in mind, he says, and it does not happen with a fresh coat of paint. That only makes a property look prettier, he says. In contrast, a lot of the work Landsman does is hidden.

“We look for life safety, energy efficiencies, and that’s where we start spending our dollars. A lot of our dollars are spent where you don’t see them, in boiler rooms or mechanical rooms to make them efficient and not too expensive to run, and we think that’s a much better model long term,” Goff says.

## At B&L

Goff learned new ways to look for efficiencies while managing the construction of Bausch & Lomb’s headquarters. Brainstorming with the brilliant minds that were assembled for the project, he says, helped find efficiencies he never would have discovered alone.

One team member asked when anyone could remember waiting in line to wash his hands in the men’s room. When they answered never, the planning decision was made to eliminate two sinks from every washroom of the building and by doing so eliminating the need for additional inches of costly granite countertops.

Careful studies were made to avoid mistakes during construction, which finished under budget, enabling the construction of Bausch & Lomb’s glass-enclosed Winter Garden.

During the last leg of his 23-year career at B&L, Goff served as vice president of administrative services and vice president of operations for the company’s Sight Savers product group. But Goff’s career in construction started well before that by route of industrial safety and hygiene.

In college, the Pittsburgh native pursued studies in safety not because he was impassioned by the field but because it was underdeveloped as a business segment and in increasing demand.

If it were not for practical reasons, Goff says, he might have gone to veterinary school instead.

“The reality is I needed a job; I had college loans,” he says.

Quickly he saw the lessons he could learn from safety, which, as an emerging

field, was met by reluctance from the business community.

At Bausch & Lomb, operations in other countries that did not already have state-imposed safety and health regulations were subject to U.S. standards under Goff's leadership.

"It wasn't good enough to be right; you had to convince people that it was best for business," he says. Accidents are not acceptable, and that, Goff says, had to move from theory to practice. "We had to find a new paradigm."

Goff experienced his own paradigm shift nine years ago that has helped fuel a voracious appetite for life, whether it is traveling, boating, golfing, skiing or working as team manager for his 15-year-old twins' hockey tournaments.

"That's my real career: I teach hockey," he laughs.

Schiller says, "He and his wife have one of their kids on their hip at all times, going out to the hockey rink or traveling to Toronto or wherever the next hockey tournament is."

Daughter Kathryn plays for the Rochester Edge U16 team in the Southern Ontario League, and son Brian plays for the Maksym Junior Hockey Team in the Empire Junior Hockey League. The twins start their junior year at Webster Schroeder High School next fall.

Friend Jack Kaminska, president of City Mattress Inc., met Goff through hockey.

Despite his apparent stoicism in formal situations, Goff is very easygoing, Kaminska says.

"He's a big teddy bear. I know he has had many stressful days, but he's never shown it," Kaminska says.

The priority Goff gives to his family is something he learned, he says. As a young executive, corporate America meant working long hours. But when his wife was diagnosed with breast cancer nine years ago, his attitude changed.

Goff met Marianne at Bausch & Lomb where she was head of customer service for contact lenses.

The couple had \$1,500 in wedding gift money and decided to buy a boat with it—even though she could not swim and he could not sail—but she took guppies lessons and soon the couple was racing competitively.

The twins were only 4 weeks old when they started boating with mom and dad.

"My mother thought I was crazy," Goff says.

When Marianne was diagnosed with cancer, Goff's understanding of family sharpened in focus. Marianne became his rock, he says. Even though she suffered the treatments and eventual mastectomy, she was the strong one in the family. Goff has drawn a lot of lessons from watching his wife's strength.

Marianne went five years cancer-free. It was an encouraging sign for the family. A year later, though, she was diagnosed with

a different form of cancer in her other breast and had to undergo the trauma again.

Goff says that because it is man's tendency to lose perspective and become self-centered, life-shaking events such as these can produce the most extraordinary change in attitude. After facing death down twice, his wife has given the family a chance to re-evaluate their benchmarks. When they spill milk on their pants at school, he says, they understand it is not the end of the world.

For Goff that perspective translated directly to his leadership at Landsman.

"None of us has done anything to deserve immortality. None of us: good, bad or indifferent. We're all in the same boat, and when you go through breast cancer—at least watching it from a distance—I think it gives you a little better appreciation. It helps put your balance into perspective and my expectations from employees."

He is not looking for heroics from employees, he says, just great service, with the understanding that they have lives outside the company.

"I think my model is much more sustainable as a long-term model than having carcasses on the side of the road as you go down the path," Goff explains.

Effective employees are the ones with well-balanced lives, he says. The same must be the case for CEOs.

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