



MICK GRONEWOLD
Fehr Graham

GUEST COLUMNIST

Engineering is everywhere

Making communities and lives better

Everywhere you look, you can see the touch of an engineer. It's in the sidewalks and parking lots around the Embassy Suites by Hilton Riverfront. It's in the South Beloit Wastewater Treatment Plant. It's in roads and bridges around the Rock River Valley and along the banks of the Rock River.

Because of engineers, you can turn on a faucet in your home and get water that's traveled through the city to get to your glass. An engineer is the reason there are safe turn lanes at busy intersections in your community. And engineers make sure we don't have to think about what happens after we flush the toilet.

For the past 50 years, Fehr Graham has delivered engineering services to the Rock River Valley and helped shape our communities into what you see today. Our firm was launched in 1973 by Freeport engineers Al Fehr and Joe Graham. Since then, we've been instrumental in everything from designing the sewer lines that connect to new subdivisions to cleaning up brownfield sites for redevelopment.

The engineering contributions Fehr Graham brings to the Rock River Valley are far from over. Some of our more notable projects are:

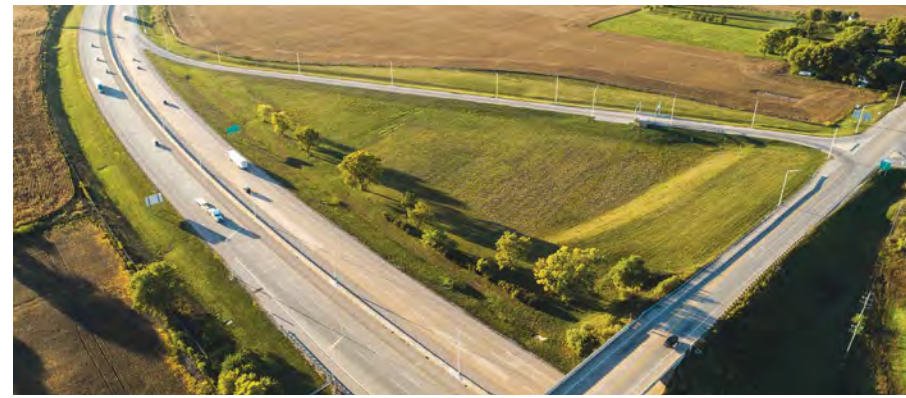
■ **Jane Addams Tollway** – The Illinois State Toll Highway Authority completed the reconstruction of I-90 from Rockford

to Chicago to relieve congestion and reduce pollution. This widening and reconstruction project is one of the first projects completed under Move Illinois, the Tollway's 15-year, \$12 billion capital program. The project was awarded an Engineering Excellence Honor Award.

■ **Rockford Lead Service Line Replacement Program** – Rockford was the second city in Illinois to take advantage of a program replacing water service lines for free after the Lead Service Line Notification Act was signed into law in 2021. We're helping the city find funding, investigate and develop plans to replace the pipes. With strategic planning, this project is also helping improve other infrastructure, like sidewalks and roads.

■ **Rockford Public Library** – The main branch of the Rockford Public Library is in the midst of \$33 million redevelopment project along the Rock River. Remediation for the building started long before construction. Our engineers and landscape architects designed a site to blend in with the riverfront while keeping a contemporary look. We can't wait to see the design come to fruition, complete with river access, seating and walking paths.

■ **Barber-Colman site** – This industrial complex has been a blighted property in south Rockford for more than 20 years, but it will soon transform into Colman



Yards – a mixed-use development of townhomes, stores, dining and more. Fehr Graham has worked behind the scenes helping with environmental remediation so the project can move forward.

■ **Embassy Suites** – Those who have been in Rockford long enough remember the former Amerock factory, which had become an eyesore along the western banks of the Rock River. We helped the city enroll in the Illinois Environmental Agency Voluntary Site Remediation program, and we helped with remedial planning before developer Gary Gorman bought the building and turned it into Embassy Suites, a hotel and convention center that opened in July 2020.

There's no doubt, we are proud of the difference we make in our community and are excited to see a new generation continue to propel us forward. Rockford Public Schools and Alignment Rockford have worked with support from key stakeholders to establish paths for the next generation of engineers to launch their careers.

We've seen public and private high schools throughout the region offer courses that encourage students to study STEM (science, technology, engineering and math). Students exposed to engineering early see futures in everything from robotics and computer-aided design to structural, electrical and

civil engineering. These are the programs that will lay the foundation for a new Industrial Revolution in our country.

At the college level, Rock Valley College and Northern Illinois University (NIU) have partnered on the Engineering Our Future program. This allows local students to attend Rock Valley at a nominal cost, while earning bachelor's degrees in mechanical engineering from NIU. It keeps students in their hometowns and connected to future employers.

Often, engineering is viewed as a career that is focused on numbers and data. But that misses the point of why engineers do what they do... to make a difference.

Whether it's helping with the redevelopment of a former manufacturing plant or improving traffic flow at a busy city intersection, the role of an engineer remains the same—to solve a problem, make an improvement, turn a dream into reality.

Mick Gronewold is a professional engineer who enjoys helping clients find solutions to their toughest problems, even when they reach beyond engineering. As one of the firm's owners, Mick specializes in leading engineering and environmental projects in the private and public sectors. Contact him at mgronewold@fehrgraham.com