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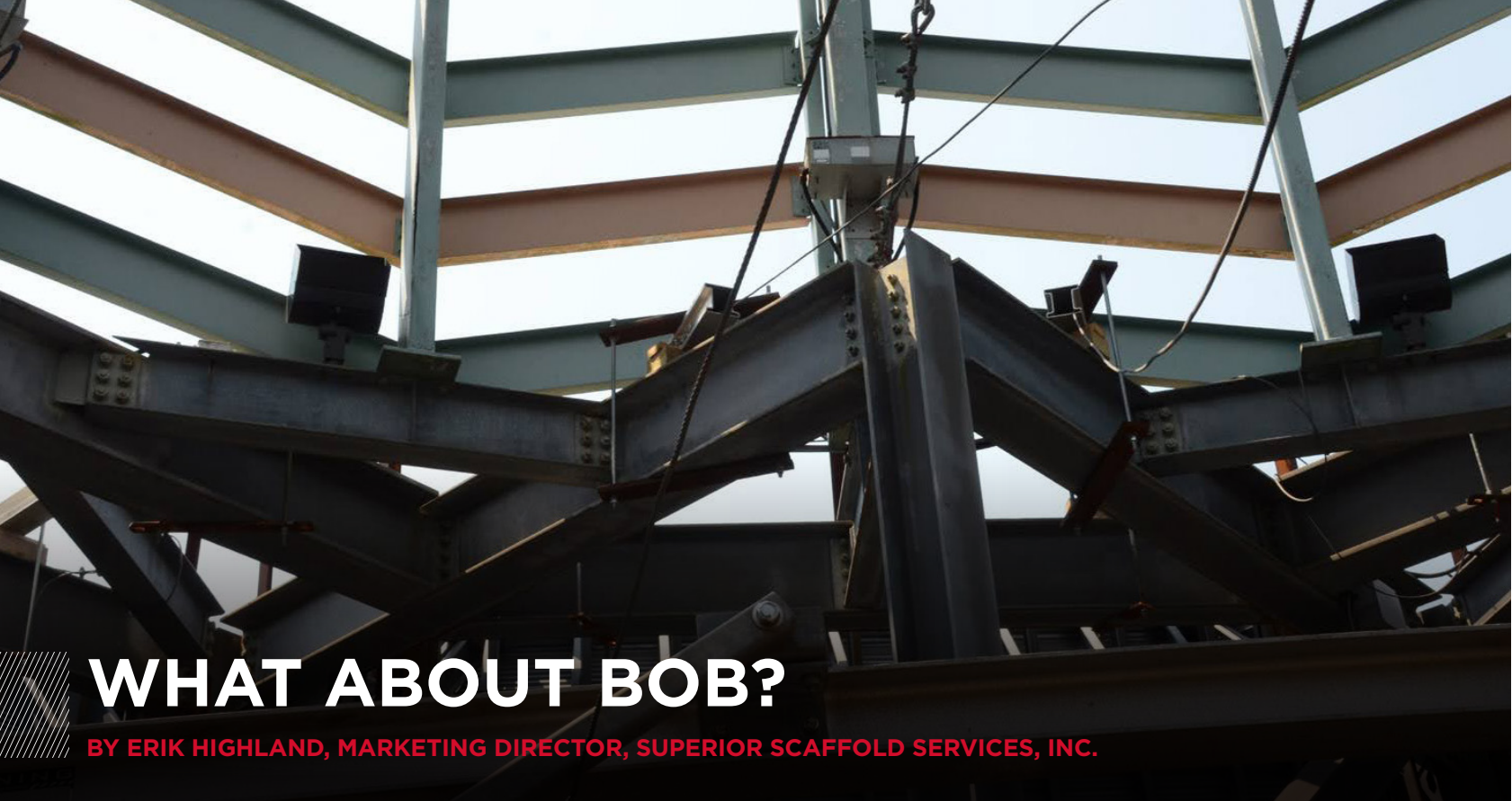
The Innovation Issue

Building Philadelphia for the Next 100 Mayors

5 Questions with Governor Shapiro

Alternative Project Delivery Defined





WHAT ABOUT BOB?

BY ERIK HIGHLAND, MARKETING DIRECTOR, SUPERIOR SCAFFOLD SERVICES, INC.

Construction innovation: In recent years, we associate this with the word “new.”

But what is actually new? Constructors need to consider an innovative spirit or approach rather than a new piece of equipment, product or app. In construction, innovation is often using existing tools and materials in new, reimagined ways.

For Superior Scaffold Services, a full-service scaffold and access company, innovation frequently results from responding to a single challenge: “We can’t do this.” Clients often say to us, “we can’t find a way to get this job done. What are we going to do?” That’s when we bring out our secret weapon, Bob Sarkisian, Superior’s Vice President and head of our Powered Access Division and all-around suspended scaffold guru. He is not Ai, a robot, an app, or a new technology. Instead, Bob exemplifies innovative spirit: he is a problem solver. Time and again, He has looked at an allegedly impossible job and come up with a solution using the tools at his disposal.

Instead of saying, “We can’t do this,” or, “Do you know of a new trick or product that we can use,” clients should be asking, “What about Bob?” to use a movie reference. His unique perspective from working many years in this industry have led to some of Superior’s most innovative scaffolding solutions. Just look at our blog.

Bob has spent 43 years seeing things that others could not. His skill for designing a scaffold system, particularly suspended scaffold, is not something that can be put into an app, a program, or even a book. To mix our references, the answer to “What about Bob?” is that Bob approaches any access job like a reality TV competition contestant who must complete a task with limited tools on hand.

At a recent job, one of Superior’s site crew members mentioned need for an innovative solution while erecting the scaffold at the University of Pennsylvania’s Huntsman Hall. The scaffold was to be erected on a second floor, outdoor courtyard, and around windows that were narrowly framed by architectural columns. The client had floated a bevy of options, but none of them worked. There was not enough structural support on the lower level of the building, nor enough space between the columns to use traditional scaffolding. So, what about Bob? He looked around and said, “No problem. We can swing this.”

Others were skeptical. Not only was the building’s roof short, but the suspended scaffold units had to fit in between decorative brick design elements.

Bob’s solution: A suspended scaffold rig that hung from 6 foot outrigger beams, weighted and anchored to the opposing side



of the building. Traditional outrigger beams, however, are two or three times longer than the space would allow and have giant rolling caster dollies that hold the beams and weight. Without the necessary space, Bob integrated the counterweights with existing tie-off points, rather than try to build around them.

He also shortened the lengths of the swing stages themselves so they would fit in between the decorative brick elements around the courtyard. The crews moved the scaffold units several times to do the work all around the quadrangle. Looking back now, the solution seems so simple but it took Bob to see it.

The same thing happened when Mara Restoration needed to get workers around the rooftop dome of the Tropicana Hotel and Casino in Atlantic City. After months of deliberating on the best way to reach the outside of the dome—which has few access points and limited surface area around it—and unable to come up with a safe, concrete plan, the client called Superior and asked for Bob. He walked around underneath the dome and said, “If we utilized the catwalk steel up air for an anchor point for our rigging, we could swing this.” His plan required hanging 24 support beams around the interior of the dome that would allow cables to be attached that would then allow swing stage units to climb up and down on them on the outside. The catch—and key to Bob’s plan: the crew would have to board the units from the portal windows in the dome and then ride up and down doing their restoration work.

These are just two of hundreds of examples Bob has come up with over the years. We at Superior may argue that clients should ask, “What about Bob?” all the time. But what about him? Like many in the Philadelphia region’s commercial construction industry, Bob will retire one day. So how on earth will we replace him? Bob’s response to this question has always been a very humble, “I don’t really know.” That’s it. There is a lot of talk about

mentorship in the construction industry, but we need someone who is both interested in this type of equipment and willing to train with Bob and have a similar vision.

Earlier, this article compared Bob’s work to a competition challenge involving a few tools on hand. While one form of innovation involves creating a new tool to solve the problem, another involves reconsidering how existing tools can be used. New construction technologies and tools tend to move and get adopted at a slower pace compared to the rest of the tech world. Yes, the motors advance, the stages improve, and our tools are helping make construction work safer, but most techniques and activities are fundamentally the same, and probably will be for quite some time.

Obviously, our goal is to keep Bob in the field as long as he’s able. And until Superior finds another person with a similar spirit, we will be left with an archive of photos, blogs and articles detailing the wonders from the mind of Bob. We are reminded that revolutionizing the entire industry starts with seeing a problem and using our available tools differently, so that an innovation—a “new” solution—can come from good ole’ fashioned creativity and experience.





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