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## **Executive of the Month: Erleen Hatfield, managing partner of Hatfield Group: Takes a creative and holistic approach**

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Erleen Hatfield, Hatfield Group

New York, NY Founded by architect and engineer Erleen Hatfield, Hatfield Group, a new structural engineering firm based in New York City, takes a creative and holistic approach to the practice. “For us, engineering isn’t just running the numbers,” said Hatfield, managing partner of the firm. “At its essence, it’s really a design problem.” The firm works nationally and internationally on all types of projects, with a particular specialty in sports, cultural, commercial, and residential developments.

Rounding out the Hatfield Group leadership team is architect Martin Finio, FAIA, who is design partner at the firm, and Chris Lamberth, director, in charge of new business and marketing.

Hatfield recently sat down with the New York Real Estate Journal for a question and answer session.

Q: Where did you grow up?

A: In Lincoln, Nebraska. A nice city of almost 300,000 people, with small town values. I was fortunate to grow up in Lincoln—it continues to be a great place.

Q: It’s rare for a person to have degrees in both engineering and architecture. Why did you choose to pursue both degrees?

A: Buildings fascinate me. I received my architecture degree first and realized I wanted to understand more about buildings, so I went on to complete my engineering degree.

Rendering of 510 Driggs - Brooklyn, NY

Q: What benefits does having both degrees bring to your clients?

A: Although I spend my day as an engineer, I have tremendous respect for architects. Having both degrees gives me a better understanding of what architects are trying to accomplish, which allows me to better solve problems for my clients—both architects and owners. I believe that good design can add incredible value to projects, and that comes from having a degree in architecture. Figuring out how to do it pragmatically comes from the engineering side.

Q: How did you go from Nebraska to New York?

A: When I was with structural engineering firm Thornton Tomasetti, I moved to Chicago to work on some of their more challenging projects. Soon after the move to Chicago, I was offered a temporary opportunity to work on the Detroit Lions Football stadium out of the New York office for six months—that was 20 years ago! I loved New York the minute I got here, and never left.

Q: Why did you decide to start your own company?

A: I believed the engineering services market was missing something, and I felt that we could do things differently and provide some real value to clients. I also wanted to have the liberty to accept work that interests me, to explore new concepts in materials and technology, and to create a positive place to work where we both treat employees well and truly help our clients realize their vision.

Q: Tell us about Hatfield Group.

A: Hatfield Group is a structural and facades engineering firm with a focus on finding the right solutions for our clients. Whether that's a typical approach to buildings or an esoteric structural challenge, our aim is to provide unparalleled engineering coupled with multilayer project collaboration. Our experience in working on some of the most complex projects in the world has given us a unique understanding of the need for collaboration between all elements of the building process. This experience enables us to provide real value for our clients—saving them money, and oftentimes allowing them to do more with their project than they had previously imagined.

Q: What about your daily work interests you?

A: Finding solutions to my clients' problems drives me. Every client is so different and has different goals and visions for their projects. This leads to myriad considerations from design and budget to schedule and more. It may be relatively simple to solve one of those problems on its own, but when taken together, it begins to become a real challenge. I like that challenge, and providing a solution to a client is rewarding. People often have great visions, and it's my job to help them realize those designs.

Mercedes Benz Stadium - Atlanta, GA

Q: Tell us about your current projects.

A: Hatfield Group has many great projects right now! One we're excited about is a multifamily residential building with architects Woods Bagot, located in Brooklyn, 510 Driggs.

Q: What is the biggest challenge you've faced in your career?

A: The new Mercedes Benz Stadium in Atlanta. The building has several pioneering design features. One is its roof design: it's the first retractable roof that opens with eight panels that move similar to a camera lens. Another is its use of ETFE (Ethylene Tetra Fluoro Ethylene), a foil, single-skin façade that has not been previously used in the U.S. Also, it is the first LEED Platinum stadium in the world.

Q: What are you most proud of in your career?

A: Having my own engineering firm, Hatfield Group.

Q: What advice would you give young people going into engineering and/or architecture?

A: Like any career, both take a lot of effort and hard work. If you like creating things, both fields provide the opportunity to be a part of projects and structures that may be around for a long time. Both architecture and engineering are rewarding fields.

Q: What books are you currently reading?

A: I am rereading “Getting to YES” and I’m also reading “BIG, HOT TO COLD,” by Bjarke Ingels.

Q: What are your goals for Hatfield Group over the next five years? Ten years?

A: Our goals are to continue to add more services—such as mechanical, electrical, and plumbing engineers—for our clients as we continue to grow. We’re working to become a new type of multi-disciplinary engineering firm that is dedicated to solving problems around the globe.

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