



Executive of the Month: David Margolius, EVP at Shawmut Design and Construction is committed to NYC and its clients

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David Margolius

New York, NY The New York Real Estate Journal (NYREJ) recently sat down with David Margolius, executive VP of the New York Metro Region at Shawmut Design and Construction, for a question and answer session.

NYREJ: Shawmut has been building in New York City for 20 years—how has your portfolio developed over time?

Margolius: When we first started building in the city, a lot of our work was high-end, luxury retail projects that depended on fast decisions, nimbleness, attention to detail and high levels of communication. While our portfolio has evolved immensely over the years—we now work with prestigious higher education institutions, world-renowned museums, prominent life sciences and healthcare systems, Michelin-starred restaurants, award-winning hotels, high-powered clienteles' residences and global retail brands—what it takes to complete these projects and exceed our clients' expectations has not, and is built into our DNA. We provide the hands-on client service and responsiveness of a boutique construction manager combined with the resources and market presence of a \$1.5 billion firm, allowing us to support our clients from site exploration through construction and close-out.

As executive sponsor of Shawmut's Diversity Leadership Council, Margolius has spoken on panels including at Procore's Groundbreak construction conference, and is one of the leaders of the peer collaboration group, Diversity and Inclusion in Construction and Engineering (DICE).

NYREJ: What makes Shawmut different than other general contractors?

Margolius: We put our people first—we win awards for it, and it means we work harder, and better, for our clients. Shawmut is dedicated to attracting and cultivating the best talent in the city. We can't expect our people to provide the best in client service if we don't provide them the best culture, opportunities, and benefits. Our approach has proven itself—this year alone we've been named a Fortune Best Workplace in New York (for the second year in a row), Fortune Best Workplace for Women, and Fortune Best Workplace for Millennials.

New York City is our home—we're excited to be part of its fabric as it reopens and thrives again. In December, I took the helm as executive vice president of the New York Metro region, with a laser-focus on deepening our roots, strategically growing within each sector we serve, and perfecting our client service and executional excellence. With that, we've invested in talented leaders who will drive our New York City team forward, recently hiring a general superintendent and a director of marketing and business development. While we know there will be challenges ahead in the industry, as a 100% employee-owned company, we will never stop investing in our future.

Shawmut completed the \$180M renovation of the InterContinental New York Barclay, maintaining the hotel's 1926 Federal-style heritage while updating to meet the needs of today's guests.

NYREJ: In an industry that's known for its lack of diversity, what are you doing to effect change?

Margolius: Workplace equity is a business imperative for Shawmut. Diversity brings diversity of thought, and that is how we deliver the best work product for our clients. Taking action, we've partnered with Deloitte Human Capital and Catalyst to build awareness of unconscious bias, improve managerial, promotion, and mentorship systems, and use data to keep us accountable. We have much more work to do, but as executive sponsor of our Diversity Leadership Council, I'm proud to share that in 2019 alone, the council reached three major milestones:

Shawmut achieved 100% pay equity;

We established a sponsorship program, pairing high-potential, underrepresented employees with executive sponsors;

We launched a mentorship program, using a sophisticated matching algorithm to pair mentors and mentees based on goals, skills, and career aspirations.

Shawmut is also dedicated to diversity, equity, and inclusion work within the industry. We're committed to growing MWLBE businesses in New York City as partners right alongside us, and have implemented strategies that will bolster our engagement with these firms, with a focus on increasing and building long-term partnerships.

In an industry that's experienced slow adoption to change around issues of DEI, we feel responsible for driving it forward. We have the same level of resolve and commitment to this crucial change that we have to delivering exceptional results for our clients.

NYREJ: What's your client service philosophy?

Margolius: We serve our clients and their projects by aligning in principle and philosophy. Our approach is one embedded in honesty, transparency, and integrity—we want to be an extension of our clients' teams, to deliver the best final product and bring their vision to life. We pride ourselves on thinking differently, innovating and coming up with creative solutions to go above and beyond—and we can only do this effectively if we fully understand our clients' ideas, hopes, and goals. We lay this strong foundation in order to build trust, allowing for quick, effective decision-making in a fast-paced, ever-changing market.

With the pandemic, this foundation of trust and understanding is more crucial than ever as new safety and health updates come in by the minute and the subcontractor workforce and supply chains continue to shift. When our team is brought in from the outset to fully align and understand a client's goals, we're able to provide feasibility reviews in real-time, secure the best workforce, and procure the highest-quality materials on behalf of our clients—all at the most competitive value and while remaining on schedule.

Columbia University's Andolfatto Laboratory co-locates

computational dry and wet labs with adjacent office space to optimize functionality for research of molecular genetics, biochemistry, ecology, genomics, and computational biology.

NYREJ: Speaking of the pandemic, how did Shawmut react to COVID-19?

Margolius: We immediately developed and implemented safety protocols, new job-site innovations, and an exhaustive risk assessment and response strategy for all our projects to keep everyone on our jobsites safe. We have our own health screening platform, Shawmut Vitals, that checks for COVID-19 symptoms and manages contact tracing—Shawmut project team members came up with the initial platform through grassroots innovation, and we developed it in-house, taking it from concept to a nationwide rollout in two weeks. We're also maximizing the use of our long-standing partner Smartvid.io's new capability to detect social distancing violations through its AI machine. Our cross-functional COVID-19 Crisis Team constantly monitors developments to provide guidance and communications to on-site client and office teams, ensuring everyone is following all federal, state, and CDC recommendations.

We've also partnered with clients to directly help them in their response to COVID-19. We donated our services for the debut of the DineOut NYC program led by Rockwell Group and the NYC Hospitality Alliance, working on five locations to help restaurants utilize the sidewalk and open streets to maximize seating capacity while ensuring social distancing and comfort for their guests.

NYREJ: What's next for Shawmut in New York City?

Margolius: We're positioning ourselves to expand our work in the life sciences, education, and cultural sectors. Our experience working with these clients both within the city and throughout the country gives us a unique perspective and expert resources to leverage. For example, Shawmut is working in one of the leading research clusters—Cambridge, MA—with leaders in life sciences architecture such as SGA. Our ability to translate experiences and lessons learned from these world-class projects to our work in New York City will set us up for success as we grow our book of business.

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