



Exec. of the Month: Thomas Perrino president and CEO of the Spiezle Architecture Group leads nationwide expansion

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Thomas Perrino

New York, NY The New York Real Estate Journal (NYREJ) sat down with Thomas Perrino, this month's executive of the month, for a question and answer session. Perrino is the president and CEO of the Spiezle Architecture Group, leading the company's nationwide expansion. The firm has opened two new offices since 2019, has hired 29 new employees and has been named one of the "Fastest 50 Growing Companies in 2020" by NJBIZ. Spiezle is listed in the Top 100 Green Design Firms by Engineering News-Record and in the Top 300 U.S. Architecture Firms by Architectural Record.

NYREJ: Tell us a little bit about your background and how you ended up in the architecture space?

Perrino: I tell people I was born into architecture. My father is an architect and I grew up under his mentorship, studying architecture, reading plans, visualizing spaces, etc. Starting in middle school, I spent most of my summers working for his firm, CJP Architects, in various roles and continued this through college. The best advice he gave me was to get out and experience architecture by working for different types of architectural firms to build a diverse background and have a better understanding of the profession. Fortunately, I had some great opportunities to join and learn at growing firms where I helped contribute to their expansion and success. I've been fortunate to have built good relationships with clients and many have followed me to Spiezle. In some cases, these are over 25-year-old connections that are still going strong today.

A private University client's Business Data and Analytics Lab

NYREJ: How would you describe Spiezle to a new client?

Perrino: Spiezle is a diverse, award-winning, employee-owned, 66-year-old architecture and planning firm with 95 employees and several offices across the U.S. We provide clients with a one-stop-shop, offering design, planning, construction administration services, interior design, landscape architecture, furniture procurement, urban planning and electrical engineering. Our primary focus is on academic, healthcare, corporate/commercial, government, hospitality, multifamily, recreational and religious market sectors.

NYREJ: What is the unique difference between Spiezle and other architectural firms?

Perrino: We provide clients with a robust team of professionals across multiple disciplines and we look at every project from a unique perspective. For example, a client may need us for an urban planning exercise, but we also consider the overall architecture and landscape architecture perspective the project warrants. Additionally, we have a great in-house Marketing and Graphics Department and we often help our clients collaborate on efforts to promote a project. Lastly, I'd say that we have thought leaders in every market sector and practice groups who stay informed about trends within the industries we serve which helps drive innovative design and education to our clients.

The Actors Fund Home is an acclaimed assisted living and skilled nursing care facility for the performing arts and entertainment community.

NYREJ: What are some unique projects Spiegle is particularly excited about?

Perrino: While each market sector has experienced growth this past year, we have seen some of the largest amount in the healthcare space. As an example, we recently designed a pop-up hospital in response to the pandemic and we are working towards several major healthcare projects in 2021, especially in the Northeast. We are particularly proud of being able to support our healthcare workers during this crisis. Additionally, education and senior living continue to remain strong markets and we are excited that this year, we expanded our footprint in Florida where we are seeing a lot of new development and investment.

NYREJ: What is your vision for Spiegle?

Perrino: Spiegle has always taken a “Smart Growth” approach to expansion into new markets. We continue this approach while we plan our next phase of growth and delivery of exceptional service to our clients. Over the last few years, we have completed three acquisitions and hired numerous employees. As an employee-owned company, we feel that growth, both organically and by acquisition, is critical to our future. Recruiting the right talent from all parts of the country, especially since we have proven that working remotely can be successful, sets us apart from others in the industry.

NYREJ: What do you think are the biggest opportunities for Spiegle in the New York/New Jersey market?

Perrino: The pandemic has left us all with varied perspectives and we have seen a tremendous amount of redesign in the healthcare sector, especially in the Northeast region. We are helping our clients expand outdoor spaces, including nurturing places for healing and areas where families can spend time with loved ones and maintain social distancing. We have also focused on designing systems that mitigate the spread of infection such as touch-free entryways and new, properly engineered ventilation to keep everyone safe. Corporate workspaces are also adapting to provide employees with more dynamic, flexible environments that account for safety while still offering a pleasant working experience. Many companies may rethink their use of large office spaces and opt to provide smaller work hubs in 2021 and beyond.

NYREJ: What, in your mind, are some of the most important challenges facing the architecture sector now?

Perrino: There are many unknowns and a great deal of conjecture right now. We don't know where clients will allocate their funds next or which public referendums will come back on the ballots. While the pandemic is a short-term issue, it has affected many areas from supply chain, to building codes, to project delays or postponements. For instance, senior housing has slowed down recently. There is an obvious demand for change in design; however, in the interest of resident safety, several facilities have restricted access of outside entities. It is for a good reason, but it has affected

construction schedules. Additionally, we are seeing a need to redefine the physical workspace so that employees can come back into the office or adapt to a hybrid model with both onsite and work remote schedules. Once we have the vaccines in 2021, this should change, but for now we must wait and see.

NYREJ: What are some new trends we can expect to see in the architecture industry?

Perrino: Architecture is arguably one of the most transformative sectors of the economy. And it evolves, along with the human condition. Prior to the pandemic, we were focused on efficiency, culture and technology. Now, adding to that, we are reevaluating sustainability measures and integrating adaptations to keep everyone safe. We are designing spaces that seamlessly blend the indoors with the outdoors to help boost people's morale and increase productivity. Our projects include usable green roofs, natural conditioning through cross-ventilation, photovoltaics, touch free devices and rainwater collection systems to name a few. As we've seen this year require more flexibility, agility and adaptability in our lives, we anticipate this trend continuing in our healthcare, educational and workspaces.

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