



Executive of the Month: Thomas Gallin, Jr. eighth president of oldest family-owned and operated construction management firm in the country

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Thomas Gallin Jr.

New York, NY Over forty years ago a young Tom Gallin sat in a work van with a carpenter named Stam. It was a sweltering summer day, and Tom was tagging alongside him to see some jobsites. It felt as if they were melting as they cruised between sites and finally Tom asked (or rather moaned), “Why is there no AC in the van?” Without missing a beat, Stam immediately quipped, “When you’re the president of Gallin, you can make sure to add AC to all the work vans!”

Founded in 1886, John Gallin & Son is the oldest family-owned and operated construction management firm in the country. Gallin provides services for commercial interiors in the New York corporate community, serving clients in finance, retail, insurance, real estate, law, nonprofit, education and more. Over the years, Stam and Tom have revisited that hot NYC summer day, laughing and reminiscing about all the things he would do when he became president of Gallin. Now in its fourth generation, Thomas Gallin, Jr. has been named the company's eighth president (and finally has complete control of the van AC!).

Hey Tom! Thanks for sitting down with us. Congratulations on your new role as president. We know you've grown up in the industry, and have been in many roles while at Gallin, can you tell us a little about that? What has been the most instructive? Do you have a favorite?

Thank you, it's very exciting. I have grown up in the industry – it's pretty inevitable when your last name is Gallin. Although I have to give our family credit and say we are good about keeping family time to family time and talking shop while at the shop.

It's true, I have worked in so many roles since I started as a mason tender. Plan clerk, estimator, marketing, finance, you name it, I have spent time doing it. I wouldn't say any one position has been more instructive than the other, rather each role is about honing your skillset and understanding how each of them impacts the client buildouts. As a partner of the firm, you're constantly involved in all aspects of the business, so I am grateful for all my past experiences here and think they will lend themselves positively to my new role as president.

What are some of the most important lessons that you've learned from the people that came before

you?

Don't panic! It's the best lesson I have learned. I always try to lead by example and be prepared for the variables.

Do you have a role model, or someone you look to for guidance?

There hasn't been one specific person, I have been lucky enough to grow up and work with a plethora of role models. I try to learn from everyone's strengths and weaknesses and see how those lessons can shape my own personal style of management and leadership. We happen to have a history that lends itself to be a form of guidance in the way we move into the future.

What was the biggest challenge you faced working your way up?

The biggest challenge I have always faced is living up to the Gallin name. There is no such thing as not giving your all to whatever you endeavor. When you join the firm, you are given a chance, from there you have to earn your way and I always keep that in mind. I always knew I would have to give everything 120% to feel like I was living up to my namesake.

How does it feel to inherit a company with so much history, and with so much of your family history wrapped up in it?

It's somewhat overwhelming. It comes with a tremendous responsibility to keep the company running smoothly while preparing the fifth generation of Gallins, and future generations from all the

other families that work alongside us, to become the next leaders. But I will say that our history provides some reassurance for me as well. You see, I know that regardless of what happens – pandemics, depressions, real estate bubbles – my predecessors have not only experienced whatever is happening but have problem-solved their way through this already at some point in time.

How have you managed to sustain Gallin through so many turbulent moments in the country's history?

When John Gallin & Son was founded in 1886, Grover Cleveland was president. There were only 38 states. The Statue of Liberty was still being built, and the New York City skyline looked very different. We've been through two World Wars, a Great Depression, the pandemic, and more stock market crashes than we'd like to count. It's through hard work, dedication, and integrity, we have not only survived, but thrived.

So, it's sufficient to say that the business model of a 135-year-old company can continue to carry the firm through ups and downs?

Absolutely! While our world has changed since the inception of our company, and we have indeed evolved with it, the industry itself remains the same. As the saying goes – everything must be plumb and level. The tools have advanced but the principles remain the same. And as that holds true, so has our underlying philosophy remained the same: the client always comes first.

So how has Gallin been able to build that family history over the years? Do you like to hire within families?

First off, have a lot of kids! I'm joking, but it's true. One of the key things that makes Gallin unique is that we have multiple families that have been with us for generations. I take pride in the fact that the children of those who worked with my ancestors work alongside me today.

Culturally, we believe in a work-life balance for everyone who works here, not just upper management. And since we are so unique in our structure, people realize once they join us that we put our money where our mouths are and treat them like one of the family. Turnover is extremely low. And similarly, our clients stay with us the way our employees do, for many years.

That's amazing. Not many companies can say the same. Speaking of culture, how do you think the industry has changed as a whole?

There are the obvious changes, like adapting new technologies and bringing sustainability to the forefront of the industry as a whole. Also, there is more of a focus on diversity, equity and inclusion, something we have always valued, and have been eager to help facilitate to the best of our ability.

I also want to point out what has not changed. It still takes a team to build a project. One of our guiding principles is that each of us is part of a team, and that it takes a team to create a project for our clients that will stand the test of time.

Going forward, what do you think will be the most important thing for Gallin to do to maintain its quality and reputation?

Continuing to do what we do now, providing the quality of work that people expect based on our reputation for over 135 years. Our clients know that their final product will meet and exceed their expectations because we are personally invested in each project's success.

What do you think is the most important thing to impart to the next generation of Gallins?

That our company and family history should be honored. But also, that our history is not something to rest upon, and to understand that they should strive for success every day. It's imperative they further improve and evolve, because one day it will be them preparing the next generation to continue our legacy.

What do you feel that you bring to the table as president?

I want to bridge the gap between the fourth and fifth generations, as well as provide stability so that our legacy continues for the next 135 years.

OK Tom, thanks for sitting down with us. To conclude, we have just two more questions. What do you do with your spare time, and if you weren't a GC what would you be doing?

Spend time with my family! I have been married for 31 years, and have an amazing son named Jake

who is currently studying business and finance at Cornell University. I love golf and the Mets which along with being a general contractor lends itself to my thick skin LOL!

As far as doing something else, I think I am doing exactly what I would have chosen to do. I have been on the business management side of things for a long while and it's what I am passionate about. I love looking at a business and making sure it's running well, identifying where improvements can be made, and rolling up my sleeves to make sure all the equations equal what they should. I guess you could say I was born to be a Gallin!

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