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The inside track

For Founder's Day at Joseph J. Albanese, CEO Phillip Albanese reminisces and looks ahead

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On Thursday, Joseph J. Albanese Inc., one of the Bay Area's largest construction subcontractors, is hosting its annual "Founder's Day" event, its first large, in-person social gathering since before the Covid-19 pandemic. It's a chance for employees to swap stories and reminisce about the company's 66-year history after more than a year of forced remote work brought on by the Covid-19 pandemic.



JEFF NEWTON STUDIO

Phillip Albanese, Joseph J. Albanese's CEO and president, has been at the company's helm since Nov. 16, 2020, taking the reins from his older brother Kevin. Friday will be Phillip's eight-month anniversary in charge of the family-owned business, which is now in its third generation.

Phillip Albanese (center), took over as leader of Santa Clara-based subcontractor Joseph J. Albanese Inc. in November 2020 from his brother Kevin Albanese.

While he says it's too early to talk about what he's accomplished so far, Albanese said he's grateful that the demand for lab, data center and industrial space has remained strong through Covid and that the company's Bay Area workforce — 890 people strong as of May — was able to get through working remotely for more than a year. The subcontractor reopened its Santa Clara headquarters late last month, which Albanese said has been a "nice deal" so far.

The following conversation has been lightly edited for length and clarity.

What is Founder's Day, and is there anything that makes this year's Founder's Day significant?

Founder's Day started the year my father John died, in 2014 ... The idea was to create that feeling of coming back to the construction yard, having food, seeing everybody and just talking about stories of the past and where the company has been.

It also reminds people of one of those things that we try to do to make our company different. I recall when I was younger, coming into the office, and there would be guys who were done working for the day or whatnot and folks in the yard having barbecues and being together after a day's work.

This Founder's Day in particular, it's just nice that we can get everyone back together. We did not have one last year; we didn't feel it to be appropriate, and we wanted to make sure the safety of our folks was at the forefront of our decision-making.

What projects are Joseph J. Albanese currently working on?

We're working on a number of tech campuses; doing some work up in South San Francisco and San Francisco, whether it be commercial space, biotech space or lab space. The data center market continues to be strong, which is beneficial.

We're also really working hard to build our presence on the public work side. One of

the other changes we've seen is on the industrial side, the distribution centers and such. Just the amount of activity that's there has really been something.

(Reporter's note: While Albanese did not highlight specific projects, the company's website includes a list of 11 past projects and also says it's involved in 75 projects daily, and has more than 100 clients.)

Looking back on your first months as CEO, what have been your biggest accomplishments and challenges so far?

As far as challenges, we're limited by our No. 1 resource, our team, and so managing that resource is critical to our operation and meeting our clients' demands. The lack of visibility that existed and that's still going on now about what work is coming back, if certain work is coming back, what's going to go ... Although you think about that every day in this business, it's definitely been heightened over the last seven months.

As a contractor, the increase in the price of commodities and raw materials, as well as the supply chain issues, have been tough. Those price increases don't equate to increases on those contracts that you hold. That's always a difficult position to be in.

That said, I've been really proud of how we've worked to look at ways to be more efficient and be more deliberate with the materials we order. I think events like price increases work to make you better.

As far as accomplishments, I think it's too early to talk about them. But I'm incredibly proud of the team's ability to work through everything that this last year-and-a-half has brought and also the company's position moving forward. It's really a testament to the organization.

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