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Retiring Burns & McDonnell CEO Ray Kowalik Leaves a Powerful Impact on Firm, Industry and Communities

KANSAS CITY, Missouri — [Burns & McDonnell](#) Chairman and CEO Ray Kowalik is retiring at the end of 2023, after leading the 100% employee-owned firm through rapid growth and job creation. Kowalik will be succeeded by Burns & McDonnell senior executive [Leslie Duke](#) on Jan. 1, 2024.

Kowalik came to Burns & McDonnell in 1987 as a structural engineer after graduating from the University of Missouri-Columbia with Bachelor of Science and Master of Science degrees in civil engineering. He began his career in the firm's Energy Group, where he led transformational advances in power generation and served as general manager for 11 years. In 2015, Kowalik transitioned from the Energy Group to become the firm's first executive vice president and president of global practices, leading the firm's business groups until taking over as CEO in 2017.

"I'm so proud of my time being a part of Burns & McDonnell and how our employee-owners care for each other, our clients and our communities," Kowalik says. "I will miss the people the most and I hope my leadership enabled employee-owners to build their careers and lives. Burns & Mac is on an incredible trajectory and I can't wait to see how Leslie's vision takes the company to the next level."

Growth and Impact

"I appreciate that Ray has been a great partner with the State of Missouri," Missouri Gov. Mike Parson said. "Under Ray's steady leadership, Burns & McDonnell has experienced substantial expansion and been instrumental in driving economic growth within our state."

During Kowalik's tenure, Burns & McDonnell grew more than 110%, from 6,300 employees to 13,500. The number of office locations has grown from 30 to 70 global locations and revenue grew by nearly 200%.

In 2018, the firm broke ground on the final building of its world headquarters campus in Kansas City, Missouri, completing the \$42 million project in 2020. Designed and built by Burns & McDonnell, the project generated work for more than 50 companies in Missouri and Kansas.

"I thank Ray for his time as a foundational leader in our community and for his tremendous investment in our city," said Kansas City Mayor Quinton Lucas. "Employing more than 5,000 people in Kansas City at Burns & McDonnell's global headquarters, the company, in large part thanks to Ray's leadership, is and

will continue to be a force in the Kansas City business and philanthropy community. Not only did he lead Burns & McDonnell in helping build our city's infrastructure, Ray also prioritized giving back to our community — and his civic commitment reverberated through the entire company. During the pandemic, we appreciated Ray's commitment to ensuring the company protected and supported those most impacted, helping make it possible for us to distribute vaccines to communities who needed it most. Our city is a healthier, better place because of it. On behalf of our entire community: thank you, Ray, for your decades of dedicated service."

The firm's construction revenue has grown by nearly 300% since 2017. Kowalik was instrumental in developing relationships and leading teams for the engineer-procure-construct (EPC) project delivery method, introducing it to utility companies across the U.S. He integrated direct-hire construction into the firm to bring a new level of innovation and efficiency to project delivery models, always keeping client success top of mind.

"Congratulations to my colleague and friend Ray Kowalik as he finishes his incredible career at Burns & McDonnell," said David Campbell, president & CEO, Evergy. "When I came to Evergy from Texas in the middle of a pandemic, Ray welcomed me to Kansas City. Burns & McDonnell and Evergy have a long history of partnership and collaboration. Over the years, Ray worked alongside us through a lot of change; working on everything from grid modernization to supplier diversity programs, to bringing sustainable and reliable energy to customers. His industry knowledge, dedication to collaboration and growth, and incredible commitment to the Kansas City region have made our partnerships all the more meaningful. Ray is a great partner, an even better person, and I wish him the best in his retirement."

Adds Robert Patrick, vice president, head of development, engineering & construction, NRG Energy: "A great steward and ambassador for Burns & McDonnell is exiting the stage. Ray has been a reliable colleague on whom we could rely for his wisdom, moral clarity and even-handed leadership. His unrelenting commitment to safety and client success contributed to the accomplishment of multiple complex projects over many years."

People at the Center

For Kowalik, the firm's people have always been the firm's biggest strength and key to success and growth. He worked to build an inclusive culture where everyone feels valued, respected and engaged. Burns & McDonnell has been honored with best places to work and healthiest employer awards locally, nationwide and globally during his tenure as CEO.

"I have worked with many incredibly talented business leaders in KC, and I always appreciate those who are focused on the 'we' rather than the 'I,' " said Tim Cowden, president and CEO of the Kansas City Area Development Council (KCADC). "Ray is that exactly — a team guy who makes sure the focus is on the outcome of each project and that it stays true to the mission of the organization. I have no doubt that the success of Burns & McDonnell during his leadership as chairman and CEO is a result of his clarity

of purpose. Being fortunate enough to work with Ray during his time as KCADC co-chair and executive committee member, I have taken many of his leadership philosophies to heart and will carry them forward for the duration of my career.”

Kowalik served as CEO throughout the pandemic, making decisions to protect employees, their families and communities while committing to stay productive and help clients.

“As a member of the Saint Luke’s Health System Board of Directors, Ray Kowalik has been an invaluable adviser and trusted community partner,” said Melinda L. Estes, MD, CEO, Saint Luke’s Health System. “When COVID-19 vaccines first became broadly available, Ray opened the Burns & McDonnell campus so our team could administer thousands of first and second doses to grateful members of the community. And as we look to the future of health care for the region, Ray’s expertise has been instrumental in helping us explore innovative ways to advance our mission to improve the health of our patients for many years to come.”

Building Our Communities

In 2022, the Burns & McDonnell Foundation and employee-owners donated \$11 million to organizations and initiatives, through both grants and contributions directed by employee-owners.

“There is no question that Ray Kowalik’s philanthropic leadership at Burns & McDonnell has been profound,” said Chris Rosson, United Way of Greater Kansas City president and CEO. “He’s established a high standard of excellence for corporate and community leadership: what it means to selflessly give and inspire others to join you along the way. Under his leadership, Burns & McDonnell staff and leadership have invested over \$45 million in communities across the country through United Way — helping improve healthcare, enhance educational opportunity and empower economic mobility for neighbors in regions where Burns & McDonnell has a presence.” Rosson continued, “Our entire community is stronger because of Ray’s unwavering commitment to United Way’s vision of a place where everyone has the ability to thrive.”

Kowalik has driven a strong focus on STEM education, investing time, resources and money into K-12 outreach efforts to build the pipeline for future interest in STEM careers.

“Ray Kowalik is the epitome of inspired leadership and commitment to community,” said George Guastello, president and CEO of Union Station Kansas City. “He is constantly looking for ways to give generously and leave a legacy that embraces and enhances the future for all of us. He’s quick to suggest the best work we all do today won’t likely show full results for many years to come. In that sentiment, Ray’s future-focused leadership is especially evident. And in the case of Burns & McDonnell’s investment in Union Station’s Science City, future STEM professionals are being nurtured and encouraged, from the earliest ages. Ray is a person of absolute integrity, inclusive in his words and actions, and prolific in the application of his core beliefs. “



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About Burns & McDonnell

Burns & McDonnell is a family of companies bringing together an unmatched team of more than 13,500 engineers, construction and craft professionals, architects, planners, technologists, and scientists to design and build our critical infrastructure. With an integrated construction and design mindset, we offer full-service capabilities. Founded in 1898 and working from 70 offices globally, Burns & McDonnell is 100% employee-owned. Learn how we are [designed to build](#).