

A New Spin on Preparing for Hurricanes

BY ALAN DESSOFF



PROFESSIONAL ENGINEERS SAM AMOROSO, JOEY COCO, AND JOFFREY EASLEY (FROM LEFT) STARTED ENGENSUS IN BATON ROUGE, LA., AFTER RECOGNIZING A NEED FOR A FIRM SPECIALIZING IN ENGINEERING AND RISK MITIGATION.

When Hurricane Katrina struck Louisiana and Mississippi in 2005, it left a message that resonated deeply with three entrepreneurial engineers with ties to the Hurricane Center at Louisiana State University. More than other less devastating hurricanes, Katrina “revealed the vulnerabilities that are out there,” says Joey Coco, P.E., one of the engineers.

Now Coco and his colleagues have moved into the business world to address those vulnerabilities. They have started Engensus, which they believe is the nation’s

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first private comprehensive company specializing in hurricane engineering and risk mitigation.

Based in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, the startup will seek to help businesses, industry, government agencies, insurance companies, and homeowners reduce future hurricane damage and manage their hurricane risk.

It will provide clients around the world with expert consultation regarding hurri-

cane threats, consequences of hurricane damage, and practical mitigation strategies by offering an extensive array of interdisciplinary services, including wind engineering, wind tunnel testing, structural engineering, forensic engineering, hurricane risk analysis, vulnerability assessments, storm surge modeling, coastal engineering, and meteorology/climatology.

Two of the company’s founders are in their 30s, and one is about 10 years older. “We are young engineers with ambitious goals,” says Coco. “We have had ambitions to go into business ourselves since we were undergraduates together at LSU.”

With a bachelor of science degree in civil engineering and a master’s degree in business administration from LSU, Coco has several years experience in the practice and management of civil engineering. “I got the MBA parttime to give me the business tools to go along with the technical tools to be able to operate this company,” he says.

Another founder, Sam Amoroso, P.E., also has a civil engineering degree from LSU and is close to completing his doctorate on the topic of wind effects on petrochemical structures. “It’s an area of wind engineering that hasn’t been explored much,” Coco says.

Marc Levitan, the third of Engensus’s creators, already has more than 20 years experience in research, education, and consulting in wind, hurricane, and structural engineering. He is director of the LSU Hurricane Center and is the Charles P. Siess Jr. Associate Professor of Civil and Environmental Engineering at LSU.

Joffrey Easley, P.E., who was a good friend of Coco and Amoroso in college, has joined the company as a civil engineer. He wrote his thesis for a master of science in civil engineering on “Development of a Performance-Based Design Approach and Related Loads for Facilities Designed as Essential During a Hurricane Event.” From writing that paper, “I felt I had a unique dataset that could be useful,” says Easley.

Like Easley’s thesis, many of the ideas leading to the establishment of Engensus originated in research and academic programs at the LSU’s Hurricane Center and the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering. Coco says they developed the concepts and established coursework in hurricane engineering, with initial support of a grant from the National Science Foundation.

Coco relates “where we’re going” in the new company to earthquake engineering, which has evolved into a defined discipline. “There are firms that focus on that. We’re trying to brand a new branch of civil engineering, a much needed field, because hurricanes cause far more damage than earthquakes,” Coco says.

Engensus wants to bring the disciplines that make up earthquake engineering, including structural, coastal, and wind engineering, “under one roof to focus on threats caused by hurricanes,” Coco says.

To identify their company, the founders sought a name that stood out. Coco says they took “ingeniosus,” the Latin root for “engineer,” and “put a spin on it” to come up with Engensus.

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