By Patrick Lapinski

EXPERTS BY YOUR SIDE

TRIMEDIA ENVIRONMENTAL & ENGINEERING ADDRESSES SOIL, WATER AND AIR ISSUES FOR CLIENTS LARGE AND SMALL

The staff of TriMedia Environmental & Engineering Services serve as environmental, health and safety consultants to a diverse a range of customers rivaling those of multinational corporations. Oil and gas, power generation and mining clients stand alongside those in the construction, manufacturing and health-care industries.

Project documents for customers fill the file folders, hard drives and desktops at TriMedia's headquarters in Marquette, Michigan, as well as at the company's Superior office. And for the clients of this business, peace of mind comes with hiring the TriMedia team of experts to help them steer clear of potential disaster, litigation and public scrutiny.

AN ENTREPRENEURIAL SPIRIT

TriMedia was founded in 1995 by a group of like-minded entrepreneurs looking to get in on the ground floor of a burgeoning environmental engineering industry. In the early years, the firm focused on asbestos mitigation, air quality monitoring and assessment and remediation of contaminated soil and groundwater. The company's name was chosen to represent the three main areas of environmental engineering: soil, water and air.

Owner and President Tom Anthos joined TriMedia as a staff scientist in the late 1990s, after a series of cross-country moves that took him from Miami to Chicago and back home to Marquette.

"I went to Michigan Tech [Michigan Technological University in Houghton] and graduated from there and headed right down to Miami, following a girl who ended up being my wife," laughed the easy-going Anthos from his downtown office. Working his way into more responsibility by nurturing his skill sets of client development and project delivery, Anthos was able to buy into the partnership of TriMedia in 2003. The firm's founders "were the true bootstrapper, entrepreneurial people," he noted, "but once the company was no longer a start-up, they were ready to do other things."

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– PRESIDENT TOM ANTHOS

Seeing an opportunity, Anthos bought the shares of other partners in late 2008 and began running TriMedia. At first, he said, "It was terrifying. But I've always been able to work hard enough to make things happen." Making the decision a lot easier was the fact that he'd been in the industry for a number of years, and he also understood the TriMedia team's capabilities and expertise. "I knew with this great team, and letting them do what they do best and supporting them and helping kind of guide the ship," that TriMedia's success would grow, he noted.

And that's exactly what happened. Under his leadership, TriMedia has grown to a "comfortable" size, Anthos said, both for him and his employees. Today, it has offices in mid-Michigan and the metro Detroit area as well as the Upper Peninsula of Michigan (U.P.), Wisconsin, North Dakota, Montana, Nebraska and Arizona.

TriMedia employs a staff of just over 60, including scientists, engineers, industrial hygienists and surveyors – people who collect soil and groundwater samples, compile and analyze laboratory data and develop written reports. It also has "geospatial folks," Anthos said – people who fly drones and work in GIS (geographic information system) computer systems, along with CAD (computer-aided design) staff that support the geospatial team.

TriMedia also handles a lot of survey work, and – job seekers, take note – the company is always interested in qualified surveyors. Lastly, two major areas of work for TriMedia are on-site safety and industrial hygiene.

INDUSTRIAL HYGIENE

When Project Manager/Senior Engineer Kathy Vermaat was asked what an industrial hygienist does, she had a 30-second response ready, because she gets that question frequently in her line of work: "If I'm just meeting someone, like at a dinner, I say something like, 'We work with hazards in a workplace, such as asbestos, PCBs [polychlorinated biphenyls], noise, silica – things like that." She added that "Industrial hygiene is identifying hazards in the workplace, measuring them and then developing a plan to mitigate them if necessary."

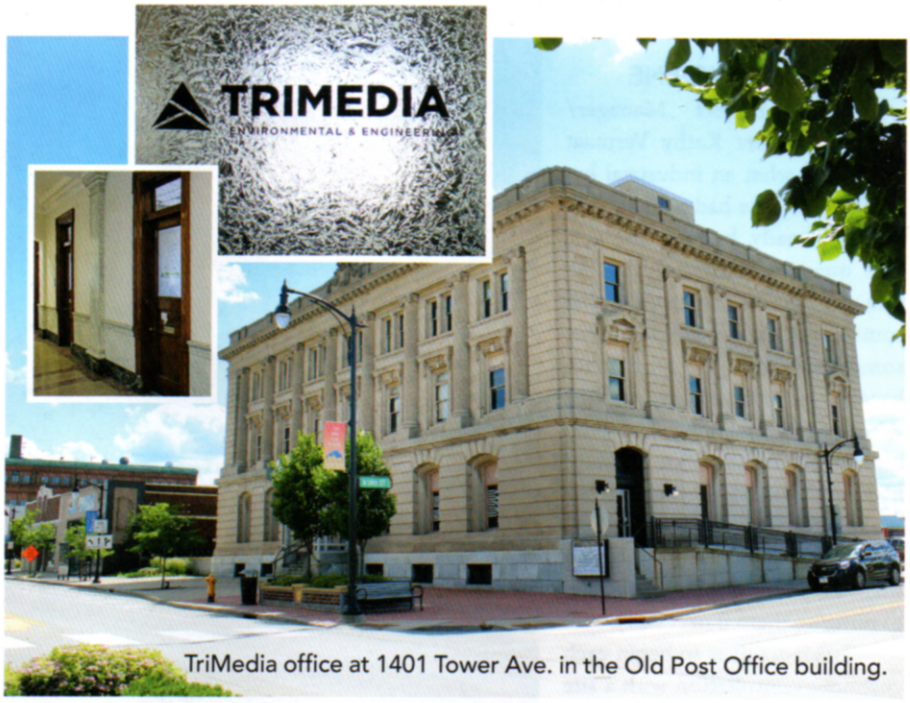
TriMedia likes to begin each customer consultation with a site visit to conduct a gap analysis, Vermaat said. "We walk through with an A-to-Z approach, examining everything from chemical storage and potential exposure during a manufacturing process to basics, like whether fire exits are clear," she explained. The TriMedia team then conducts a comprehensive risk assessment, identifying what the issues are, what the risks are and whether those risks could potentially become reality – and if an event occurs, how serious it could be. Following these analyses, the team develops a priority plan, from most important to least important, for their clients to address.

"WE REALLY WANT TO HELP YOU DEVELOP A SYSTEM THAT ADDRESSES YOUR ISSUES AND BECOMES SELF-SUFFICIENT."
– PROJECT MANAGER-SENIOR ENGINEER KATHY VERMAAT

Once they reach that point, Vermaat says TriMedia staff develop a program to help their clients, whether it entails engineering controls in the field, a training regimen or wearing PPE (personal protective equipment). In some cases, they even help clients hire an environmental health and safety employee, set up a program and train them. "One of the things we say with our clients when we send them proposals is that we're not trying to be your consultant for years. We really want to help you develop a system that addresses your issues and becomes self-sufficient," said Vermaat.

While the majority of TriMedia's early clients were in Michigan, the company has expanded into bordering states, including Wisconsin, where it is under a contract to assist state institutions (such as the Department of Corrections and Department of Administration-Division of Facilities Development) on an as-needed basis with issues of industrial hygiene, air monitoring and ergonomics. In recent years, TriMedia also assisted Northland College in Ashland, Wisconsin, by conducting a risk assessment of its campus facilities, establishing guidelines for everything from waste disposal to storage labeling and handling and

Emergency response.



TriMedia office at 1401 Tower Ave. in the Old Post Office building.

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disposal of laboratory chemicals. A lot of it may seem like just using common sense – but as TriMedia well knows, when people are unaware of the potential dangers, many items often go unnoticed.

THE SUPERIOR OFFICE

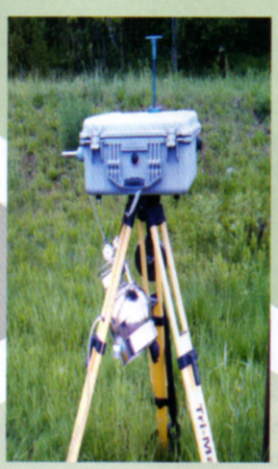
In 2010, TriMedia established a permanent satellite office in Superior, which is located in the old Post Office building at 1401 Tower Ave., Ste. 208. "It just seemed like we were making that drive from Marquette all of the time," Anthos recalled. "We had a couple of folks who were interested in peeling off and working out of that space. It just seemed to make a ton of sense to head that way. Superior is a nice town that has a lot of the same sort of flavor as some of the U.P. towns. It felt like a good vibe for us."

Like the U.P., Minnesota's Iron Range also feels familiar, due to the region's mining operations. In fact, TriMedia has worked on projects for diverse clients (including mining and energy companies, engineering firms and the U.S. Coast Guard) in Northwest Wisconsin and Northeast Minnesota, and it knows the Twin Ports area well.

Heading the Superior office is Tom Myers, a health and safety staff scientist. On any given day, Myers could be conducting ergonomic assessments, asbestos inspection of buildings prior to renovation or demolition or working with local developers that want to redevelop properties, such as old gas stations, to make sure they're aware of any legacy contamination. One area of specialty in Superior is environmental due diligence, conducting two-phase assessments for schools, small manufacturing companies and electrical utility operations.

While the field staff gathers volumes of information, all of that data needs to be processed, analyzed and coalesced into reports for their clients. Senior Scientist Ryan Whaley manages TriMedia's team of scientists, engineers and field staff from his office in Marquette. Because the company works with diverse governmental, municipal, corporate and private entities, Whaley reviews the field reports for quality assurance and control, ensuring that they comply with specific regulatory requirements, in addition to TriMedia standards, before submitting these documents to their clients.

It's important to note that a majority of TriMedia clients in northern Wisconsin and the U.P. are smaller businesses that don't have the capacity or expertise that a larger corporation may have to handle all areas of compliance. "A lot of the nuts and bolts work we do that's kind of the groundwork for environmental work is commercial property transaction and due diligence associated with that," said Whaley. For instance, if property buyers or lenders for a commercial property are looking at a property and want to know what environmental risks may be associated with that property, they contact TriMedia to conduct a Phase 1 Environmental Site Assessment in accordance with the ASTM (American Society for Testing and Materials) Standard.


Air quality monitoring.


Noise and vibration assessment.


Mining facility environmental remediation, NORM (Naturally Occurring Radioactive Material) survey and safety oversight.

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– SENIOR SCIENTIST RYAN WHALEY

TriMedia works with the client or property owner to address the contamination. These projects often include former industrial sites that require cleanup and monitoring. But more frequently, they're small sites associated with retail business, such as gas stations. "There are a lot of gas stations that have had tanks in the ground for quite some time," he explained. "Some have been abandoned for quite some time, so there are issues associated with petroleum releases that arise from those tanks and/or the piping or dispensers."

The Phase 1 Environmental Site Assessment is a qualitative assessment of the property to assess its historical use as well as any kind of use that would flag concerns for environmental contamination. After that, Whaley said that if TriMedia identifies concerns, it recommends what's called a Phase II Environmental Site Assessment. This is a quantitative analysis of the property in which the staff conducts some soil borings and collects soil samples (as well as groundwater samples, if present) for laboratory analysis.

If they do identify contamination, Whaley said there might be a need for remediation of some form. If that's the case,

Electrical system GIS mapping

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– GIS MANAGER KEN KAISER

THE GEOSPATIAL WORLD

Flying low over an open field, a drone sends information back to a tablet in the hands of a TriMedia field engineer. That's an increasingly frequent scenario in this company's ever-increasing use of high-tech tools in the realm of geospatial mapping.

TriMedia GIS Manager Ken Kaiser noted that in the late 1990s, when GIS was fairly new, everything was in DOS (disk operating system) command lines, and people had to compile their own data or scan a paper topographic map. "Now it's totally different. There's so much stuff online – everything is in the cloud," Kaiser said. "I can have my guys in the field with an iPad and a sub-meter antenna. They can see themselves live, they can collect data in forms, they can submit that data, and it instantly comes to me in the cloud." He added that they can instantly see what they just mapped, right on their tablets: "It's just leaps and bounds over what it started out as."

Kaiser said that GIS is used in all phases of a project's development, especially pre-planning for linear construction projects such as a power corridor or a pipeline. "If they're planning to build a pipeline, GIS is a great tool to try to find out where can they build it, because you can overlay all kinds of different data layers," he explained. "You can overlay parcel ownership, you can overlay zoning, you can overlay topography, you can overlay wetlands, all at the

same time, to finally find out – okay, where could the route potentially go for this?"

The information gathered on the tablets is uploaded directly from the field to the cloud, where it's accessed by Kaiser and his team. They, in turn, verify the information, input the data onto the maps and publish it back out into the field, so that the next day, everyone has yesterday's data on their tablets live in front of them as they begin work. In addition, under Kaiser's management, GIS is now integrated into all aspects of TriMedia, including accounting, to track hours for a specific job on a real-time basis.

Kaiser also says he likes creating web apps that make the process more efficient. "The field apps are basically forms that our guys fill out in the field," he said. "So if they found a utility, it automatically asks them: Is it a buried utility? Is it above-ground? If they select 'buried,' other screens pop up with queries about buried utilities, like 'Is it a pipeline?' If yes, what type of pipeline? This just makes it very, very easy for those guys to collect data in the field and submit it to me."

Baseline indoor air quality monitoring

SAFETY AND TRAINING

At the root of all data collection and analysis and the sharing of information is safety. In fact, safety is paramount to TriMedia staff as well as its clients, given the nature of their work and the many complex, stringent regulations they must comply with. As a consulting firm, most of this company's environmental work takes place on location, in the field. So to make sure that their scientists and technicians are safe, TriMedia invests heavily in employee training.

Safety Manager Kelly Levely is in charge of that training at TriMedia. "Being a consultant firm like we are, we work in a lot of various environments," he explained. "There are a lot of times when we go to a facility and we don't know what we're getting into. So the broader our staff safety training

"OUR TEAM OF CERTIFIED EHS PROFESSIONALS CAN DESIGN CUSTOM MODULES TAILORED TO OUR CLIENTS' INDIVIDUAL NEEDS."

– SAFETY MANAGER KELLY LEVELY

can be, the more likely they are to be able to recognize hazards in those situations when they don't necessarily know what it is they're walking into."

Levely makes sure that all staff members have the right training and are taking the proper precautions to ensure that sites are safe, and that they have safe access before entering a location. He also ensures that they have procedures in place in case of an emergency, so that they can react to the situation safely and effectively.

HAZWOPER training

Increasingly, safety training is also a significant part of TriMedia's service portfolio for clients, including developing and implementing safety programs for their clients on a jobsite or in their facilities. For example, TriMedia has worked with clients like 3M to assist them in site-specific HAZWOPER (an OSHA-developed Hazardous Waste Operations and Emergency Response Standard program) training, including live emergency response scenarios.

Recent COVID-19 pandemic restrictions have made on-site training more difficult, so the company has expanded its in-house, online training platform for clients. Developed by TriMedia Industrial Hygienist Jason Gizicki, Drive EHS is TriMedia's web-based Learning Management System,

which provides access to more than 50 courses, including COVID-19 issues. "Our system also gives users the ability to host their own internally developed courses," said Levely. "Or our team of certified EHS [environment, health and safety] professionals can design custom modules tailored to our clients' individual needs."

"BEST COMPANY I'VE EVER WORKED FOR"

Since its founding in 1995, TriMedia has grown into a close-knit team of environmental specialists dedicated to their clients and to their company. "I've probably been at TriMedia longer than about three other people here," said Vermaat. "As we've grown, we've maintained that kind of smaller company feel. Anyone can call the boss directly. He treats us like human beings, and he just expects we'll do the same back to him."

Kaiser echoed her sentiment. "They're awesome – best company I've ever worked for, by far," he said. Why is it the best? "I think it's our size," Kaiser added. "We're kind of the right size, so that everyone knows everyone. Everyone's comfortable working with everyone. I know this sounds kind of generic, but it's like a family."

When asked to describe what kind of company TriMedia is, their boss was quick to respond. "I would really love it to say we're a great place to work," Anthos said simply. "We're a great company to work with – to work for."

Anthos and his staff clearly are committed to making the world we live in a better place, helping their clients to ensure environmental safety, health and wellness. And they're ready to tackle and help solve tough problems.

"So if you're a prospective employee, we would like to talk to you," Anthos said. "And if you're a prospective client, obviously, we'd love to talk to you." PS

Patrick Lapinski is a freelance writer who grew up in Superior.

Phase I ESA and asbestos surveys