

ENR 2018 Top 25 Newsmakers

John Matyasovszky: Successfully Keeping Seattle's Looming Tower From Becoming a Leaning Tower



Matyasovszky led the tricky shoring-and-drilling operation that kept a deep pit from undermining a 40-story tower.

PHOTO BY BRIAN MORGEN/MAGNUSSON KLEMENCIC ASSOCIATES

January 10, 2019

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A project with the name “5th and Union” blends in with the 89 other shoring and drilling jobs on John Matyasovszky’s chronological list of work since 2005—when the Malcolm Drilling Co. senior superintendent began as a laborer.



Matyasovszky

But 5th and Union, a Seattle job known by most as the Rainier Square redevelopment, is a true stand-out. It is unlike any of Matyasovszky’s—or anyone else’s—shoring jobs. The delicate operation required near-surgical precision to keep the adjacent—and occupied—40-story office building from becoming the leaning tower of Seattle—or worse.

During the shoring operation, which ended successfully last summer, “We kept thinking: ‘We screw up here, and the building is falling on us,’” says Matyasovszky.

“It was the highest-risk and highest-profile shoring wall we ever designed and built,” adds Brice Exley, associate geotechnical engineer for Hart Crowser (HC), the development’s geotech.

To avoid undermining Rainier Tower during an excavation as deep as 85 ft, HC designed a sturdy secant-pile concrete wall, stabilized by eight rows of 262 tieback anchors—inclined at 17.5°—drilled as much as 135 ft through weak soils under the 514-ft-tall tower to the street beyond.

Matyasovszky characterizes the drilling as “swiss-cheesing” the soil, while the occupants of the tower, which sits on a 12-story pedestal, looked down. “There were lots of eyes on us,” he says. But he adds that constant communication with HC and a good team gave him confidence.

“The work John did was simply outstanding,” says Max Cummings, senior project engineer for the contractor, Lease Crutcher Lewis. “John worked through each of the challenges, running a phenomenal crew.”

Exley adds, “John never wavered. He knew Malcolm could build the wall and reassured us every time we made a design change.”

Matyasovszky grew up in Connecticut, hoping to be a policeman or a fireman. He never set out to be a shoring pro. In 1996, fresh out of high school, he joined the army and went to Fort Lewis, near Seattle, where he stayed until 1999. He met his wife in 1997. By 2001, they had two children.

When his job pressure-washing equipment slowed down, Matyasovszky, who needed a steady income to support his family, joined Malcolm.

“It was probably one of the best decisions I’ve made,” he says. “I didn’t think I would rise at Malcolm, but I was surrounded by good people and I took to them.”

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