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Engineering Firm Drops "Squaw" from Name

Thirteen years ago three civil engineers formed a consulting firm. They named the firm Squaw Bay Corp after Squaw Bay at Moosehead Lake—the site of their first job. From a small start in 1987 the Cumberland based firm has grown and prospered. Today it has a staff of seventeen and has completed projects throughout northern New England.

Last year controversy over the meaning and use of the word “squaw” seized public attention. The controversy showed that some consider the term to be derogatory. Faced with this situation, the partners agreed that changing the firm’s name would be appropriate. Continuing as Squaw Bay Corp would have preserved the name recognition that took thirteen years to develop, but would also have offended some clients and members of the public.

The decision to change the name had certain immediate ramifications. One was the difficult task of selecting a new name. There were many suggestions, but it was nearly impossible to get everyone to agree on what name was the best. The biggest shock, however, came when the financial costs were recognized. There were legal fees, a new name registration fee, design fees for creating a new company logo, and costs for printing new stationary, business cards, and brochures. There were service charges for changing e-mail addresses, other computer related costs, and the expense of an announcement plus the postage for a mailing list of over 1000. On top of this list was the cost of staff time to take care of the details. For a small company, the total cost was substantial.

As of the first of June, Squaw Bay Corp became SYTDesign Consultants. SYTD is an acronym using the first letter of the last names of the four partners—Tom Saucier, Dave Young, Peter Tubbs, and Scott Decker. The change has prompted numerous phone calls and e-mails. To date, most, but not all, have been supportive and sensitive to the value judgement that was made. According to Scott Decker, “The decision was difficult, but it was the right one. We are in the business of serving clients, not offending them.”