

Environmental goes international Tuscaloosa-based company has a rich mixture of employees and portfolios

By April Wortham
Staff Writer
April 02, 2006 3:30AM

TUSCALOOSA | At its corporate headquarters on 23rd Avenue, P.E. LaMoreaux & Associates has a map showing the locations of its past and current projects.

It's a world map.

The international environmental consulting firm founded in Tuscaloosa 45 years ago has provided services on six continents in 14 countries and 39 U.S. states.

In addition to its Tuscaloosa headquarters, the firm has an office in Cairo, Egypt, and U.S. branches in Mobile, Ala.; Jackson, Miss.; Lakeland, Fla.; and Oak Ridge, Tenn.

PELA is an international firm in more ways than one. The firm has employees from Pakistan, Ireland, Egypt, Syria, China and Romania on its staff. The Tuscaloosa office alone represents five different nationalities.

"If you wanted consulting in hydrogeology, we could do it in almost any language in the world, just from our own staff," said founder and senior hydrogeologist Philip E. LaMoreaux.

Hydrogeology is the science of how water interacts with the earth, usually below the surface in the form of groundwater. While hydrogeology remains the firm's forte, PELA has expanded its services to include expertise in geology, engineering, environmental science, waste management and archaeological/cultural resources.

Hilda Lockhart, director of the International Trade Division of the Alabama Development Office, said PELA is well respected in its field throughout the world. Last month, she presented the firm with the Governor's Trade Excellence Award.

PELA was one of eight Alabama companies to receive the award, which was given for the first time this year as part of Gov. Bob Riley's emphasis on promoting the state's export growth.

"They're a good advocate for us when we're trying to raise the level of awareness of



Bashir A. Memon, executive vice president of P.E. LaMoreaux & Associates, takes a water sample from a site near Rose Boulevard in Northport on Thursday.
Staff photo | Michael E. Palmer

• [Discuss this story](#) **who they are**

P.E. LaMoreaux & Associates is an international environmental consulting firm founded 45 years ago in Tuscaloosa by Philip E. LaMoreaux.

exporting, because they do just a good job," Lockhart said.

One of PELA's earliest projects involved development of the water supply in the desert of western Egypt. Since then, the firm has offered consulting on a number of projects, from foundation studies related to dam construction in Bogota, Columbia, to the evaluation of coal reserves here in the Warrior Basin of Alabama.

During the mid-1980s, PELA consultants helped the city of Damascus, Syria, determine how much water could be pumped from the Fiegh Springs, the third-largest springs in the world.

Legend has it that Hannibal, on his way home to Carthage after sacking Rome, watered his elephants at the springs, which serve as the primary water supply for Damascus, a city of 3.5 million people.

Jim LaMoreaux, PELA's president and Philip's son, said the tensions in nearby Beirut, Lebanon, were never far from the crew's minds. During their stay, a military general was assassinated at their hotel, he said.

"It was quite an experience to be doing a pumping test with bombing going on a short distance away," he said.

Closer to home, PELA performed a study to settle a lawsuit between Perrier and Coca-Cola regarding whether the French company's water was naturally carbonated. PELA determined that it was, and Philip LaMoreaux testified before the Federal Trade Commission, which ruled in Perrier's favor.

Philip LaMoreaux also serves as editor of the international journal *Environmental Geology*, published 12 times a year in Germany. Jim LaMoreaux serves on the editorial advisory board for the journal, which is read by environmental scientists around the world.

"In the hydrogeology arena, they are well-recognized and carry high esteem among their colleagues," Marcus Milling, executive director of the American Geological Institute in Alexandria, Va., said of PELA.

While most companies start locally and branch out from there, PELA has done the opposite. It's only been in the last several years that the firm began doing work close to home.

The firm recently signed on to help the cities of Tuscaloosa and Northport develop a plan to protect Lake Tuscaloosa, said Lois George, PELA's vice president of environment and ecology.

A PELA archaeologist surveyed buildings in downtown Tuscaloosa to determine which ones should be protected as part of the city's urban revitalization project, George said. The firm also will be involved in the removal and disposal of asbestos in buildings that are scheduled to be razed as part of the project.

Reach April Wortham at april.wortham@tuscaloosaneews.com or (205) 722-0213.