

## Early leader in eco, health industries on a new mission

The longtime environmental executive and former U.S. Army scout is turning over his business to another management veteran.

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Bruce Bomier has always been kind of an inquisitive scout, with a scientific and environmental bent.

As a teenager and college student, he worked on rural survey crews, traversed and hunted the Rum River woods north of Anoka.

After graduation from the University of Minnesota in forensics in 1968, Bomier joined the Army. As a scout, Bomier probed ahead of his troops. He was wounded during the invasion of Cambodia in 1970.

"They had to carry me out of Cambodia," he quipped. "I'd had enough of the jungle. I always liked Minnesota winter."

Bomier earned a master's degree in public health at the university while working at the state planning department.

Intrigued by health, safety and the environment, Bomier started the Minnesota Institute of Public Health in 1973, a nonprofit that disseminated research and recommended solutions to policymakers on everything from smoking to pesticide use.

"Government and industry were increasingly interested in prevention, cutting workplace injuries, and public health," he recalled. "We calculated risks, solutions to problems and published them."

His institute was acquired by Blue Cross Blue Shield of Minnesota in 1998 for about \$3 million, which expanded the business.

That left Bomier to run Environmental Resource Council, an Anoka foundation funded with the proceeds of the sale of the institute and a small for-profit company he incorporated in 1986, Institute for Environmental Assessment (IEA).

"Everybody thought the environment was about poets and protesters," Bomier said. "I thought it was going to become part of business."

Bomier said the Brooklyn Park-based firm, which employs about 60 engineers, industrial hygienists, safety inspectors, asbestos/lead-abatement specialists and taps into a network of consultants, had revenue of about \$6.5 million last year. IEA works with businesses, schools and other institutions to comply with evolving laws, address safety issues from bleachers to asbestos cleanup to bloodborne pathogens, hazardous waste and OSHA inspections and record keeping. And throw in less energy use and a smaller carbon footprint.

One of his first clients was ECM Publishers, a community newspaper and printing company founded by the late Gov. Elmer Andersen, also a successful businessman and environmentalist. Bomier was impressed with ECM's commitment to worker safety, management of chemicals and energy efficiency. Andersen believed there was a future in a company focused on preventing costly injuries and workplace pollution, which can result in expensive accidents and cleanups.

Bomier, who will be 63 this month, said it was time to turn the business over to a veteran operations executive. Last month, he hired Jeff Athmann, the No. 2 executive at ECM, to head IEA. Bomier has agreed to gradually sell a majority stake in IEA to Athmann over the next decade.

Athmann, 47, who worked at ECM since 1983, most recently as chief operating officer,



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Bruce Bomier, left, and Jeff Athmann

said he's intrigued by IEA's mission and the opportunity to work in a smaller organization with growth and ownership potential. Moreover, the Obama administration's push for "greener" buildings could help IEA.

Bomier, who will remain chairman and a very interested shareholder, wants to spend more time closing the loop between business and environmental issues through the foundation, the Environmental Resource Council of Anoka. Appointed by three governors over 15 years on the policy-setting Minnesota Environmental Quality Board, Bomier also serves on the board of the Freshwater Society and the James J. Hill Library, the business research institute endowed by the railroad baron.

"I want to use those resources to work on a center for environmental solutions for business and environmentalists," Bomier said. "Free, real-world solutions."

Athmann calls Bomier a visionary. Bomier, who cringes, admits that he's not the most focused day-to-day manager.

"Jeff is a much better operating guy than me," Bomier said. "I'm still kind of a scout."

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