

## ***IBEW Local 613 Critical to Georgia Contractor's Diversification and Exponential Growth***

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A great business does not eliminate, but anticipates and meets every challenge with great leadership and thoughtful decision making, and drives growth by taking calculated risks. At least that is what John Hogue, President of Operations at Technical Associates (TA), believes has led to their great success in the last five years, particularly in the last 12 months, as the economy has attempted to rebound. In 2004, the Engineering firm, based in Albany, GA generated just over \$18M in sales. Growth in the core business plus the addition of two new subsidiaries have driven these numbers tremendously, achieving just over \$40M in sales in 2010 with growth targeted at \$100M in the next seven to ten years.



**John Hogue**  
*President of Operations*  
Technical Associates

Hogue, who is based in the Kennesaw office, said that TA was able to launch these two new divisions, TA Process Systems, LLC (fabrication) and TA Services Group, LLC (electrical contracting services) in 2008, even in the face of a down economy, by leveraging their reputation with existing clients to provide a steady customer base as well as exceptional internal leadership. With the support of the Board of Directors, he explained that the company's plan was to offer turnkey solutions and invest in future growth with new ventures that are natural extensions of existing business.

Success, however, turned out to be anything but easy. For the first two years, TA Services operated close to the red and struggled to convince customers to give them the opportunity to do electrical work, although they held a high reputation as one of the area's leading engineering and integration firms. Even with this strong foundation of engineering and design, actually performing the installation work turned out to be more of a challenge than expected, both because of their inexperience early on, but mostly because of their inability to find qualified labor. This was particularly true on the TA Services side, which is responsible for large electrical and mechanical installations. As TA Services began to win opportunities for electrical work, this problem became more pronounced. "We could not staff jobs fast enough or with the right people – it was like drinking from a fire hose," remarked Hogue. "We could not hire dependable labor and it was killing us to find qualified craft that gave us a chance of success with clients, much less managing and executing ongoing growth with new customers." TA almost threw in the towel on the venture in late 2009.

**Hogue explained that is when some internal leadership, who were experienced with the electrical union, highly recommended that executive management meet with Gene O' Kelley, Business Manager of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, IBEW Local 613. TA was intrigued by IBEW's new trial or "try before you buy" program. This program allows contractors to sign a "Letter of Ascent" which allows a contractor a 12 month trial period in which to use union labor and resources**

**before moving into a multi-year contract. If not satisfied, the contractor can walk away with no further obligation.**

At the end of 2009, TA moved forward by signing the Letter of Ascent and began working electrical jobs using IBEW's on-demand workforce; an on-call treasure trove of skilled journeyman wireman, apprentices and construction wireman and electricians.

Partnered with the IBEW, Hogue said that they are working to build a core group of electricians that "want to belong" within the growth-driven and entrepreneurial culture at TA. Hogue also identified IBEW's training programs as a huge benefit of the union. "We have a ready resource for training and education at every level, which only makes our business stronger," said Hogue. "IBEW's training programs are the best in the business." In October 2010, IBEW held the grand opening of their new 30,000 square foot education facility school in Norcross, employing a mix of state-of-the-art hands training and traditional classroom instruction.

In 2010, TA Services workforce swelled to over 75 resources and is currently working with 43 IBEW electricians with more than 20 vehicles, while deploying a large investment of tooling and equipment. In March 2010, TA moved up to a new warehouse located in Kennesaw with just less than 50,000 square feet of space that houses over 125 engineering and install resources and boasts a state-of-the-art stainless steel fabrication facility.

Overall, Hogue identified new, effective internal leadership, their strong existing reputation, and partnership with the IBEW as key "pillars of success" for TA. "There is no way we could be successful without the support of Local 613," said Hogue. "Just like any business relationship, it has its challenges, but only with rare exception, IBEW quickly resolves any issues...and after all, since we all know relationships will inherently have their challenges, it is how those challenges are professionally managed and overcome that matters most."

In addition to signatory contractor, TA is now a member of the Atlanta Electrical Contractors Association (AECA); a relationship that Hogue said adds value both in understanding union requirements and helping to work with the union personnel. "Being a member of the AECA allows me to work on the business without having to become an expert in union guidelines," said Hogue.

***After 12 months working with IBEW, Hogue is impressed with the customer focused attitude and in Gene O' Kelley's vision/knowledge of business. "He just takes care of things," said Hogue. He said the union has been good for business, "delivering the skilled labor we need to grow and succeed...they are pro business, pro customers and laser focused on customer relationships." Hogue said there was never a time that TA considered opting out of the trial program and looks forward to a bright future of significant growth and continued partnership with IBEW.***

For more information on IBEW, please visit [www.ibew613.org](http://www.ibew613.org) or call Gene O' Kelley at 404-523-8107. To check out the new apprenticeship school, visit [www.aejatc.org](http://www.aejatc.org), contact Russell Smith, Education Director, at 404-523-5400, ext. 7 or email inquiry to [rsmith@aejatc.org](mailto:rsmith@aejatc.org).