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Luckett & Farley CEO: 'Your reputation can’t live on yesterday’s work'



Rolf Provan, president and CEO of Luckett & Farley, in the architectural design firm’s Old Louisville headquarters.

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By Joel Stinnett – Senior reporter, Louisville Business First
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Editor's note: *This article is part of a series of 10 profiles of businesses in Greater Louisville that have been in operation for 150 years or more leading up to the 150th running of the Kentucky Derby on May 4. The series is sponsored by Churchill Downs Inc.*

Most cities are lucky to have one signature structure so recognizable that people far and wide can name its location just by seeing its photo.

Louisville has two.

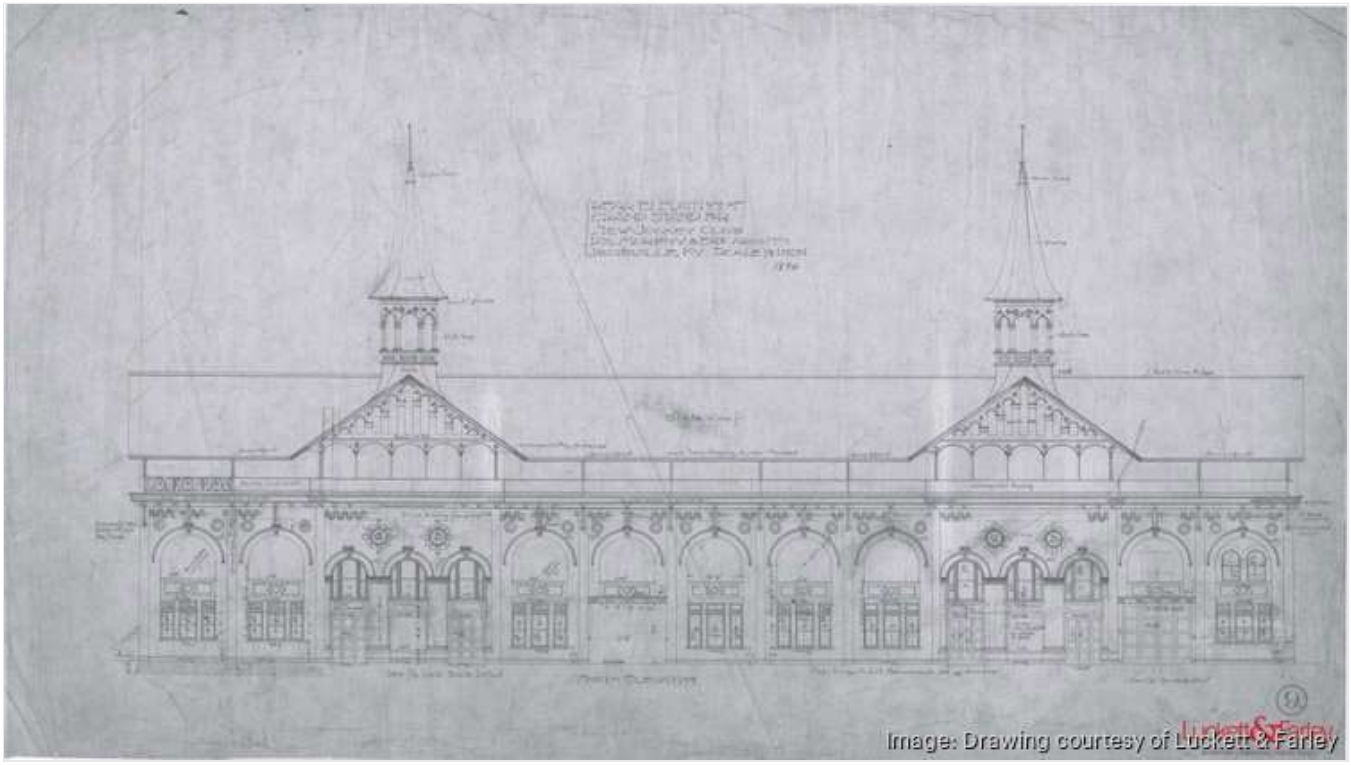
Debuting in 1895 as part of a new grandstand, the iconic Twin Spires of Churchill Downs were designed by 24-year-old Joseph Baldez, who thought the structure "needed something to give it a striking appearance," according to a Kentucky Derby Museum post.

Nearly 130 years later, there is perhaps no landmark that strikes thoughts of the city of Louisville more strongly than the Twin Spires.

And just like the Twin Spires, the Louisville-based architecture firm Baldez worked for is still standing.

Founded in 1853 by Isaiah Rogers and Henry Whitestone, what's now called Luckett & Farley has designed some of the regions's most well known structures, including the Louisville City Hall Clock Tower, the L&N Railroad Office Building, the Louisville Zoo, the Louisville X-treme Sports Park, numerous Churchill Downs projects and several distilleries, such as Rabbit Hole Distillery's first steel rickhouse in NuLu.

In 1890, the firm was renamed D.X. Murphy & Brother, before Jean D. Farley and T. D. Luckett II purchased the company in 1962 and renamed it Luckett & Farley Inc.



Designed by DX Murphy & Brothers Architects now Luckett & Farley New Jocky Club with Grandstand, featuring the Twin Spires, Churchill Downs, Louisville, KY Drawing date 1894 Architectural Elevation, on Velum

DRAWING COURTESY OF LUCKETT & FARLEY

How Luckett & Farley harnesses the power of design

Today, the company is led by President and CEO Rolf Provan, who took over the firm in 2022, after starting at Luckett & Farley for years earlier as vice president of business development and marketing. The firm is the second-largest in Greater Louisville, with 13 local registered architects as of last year, and about 60 employees in total.

In fact, Provan has far more experience as a marketer than an engineer, having worked with brands like Shell, Coca-Cola and Volvo.

But he says design and branding transcend industry.

“My wife is an industrial designer and I think both of us believe really strongly in the power of design as a discipline, regardless of what kind of design. Whether it’s product design or building design, I believe that it is a lot of times underestimated,” Provan said. “What’s interesting about Luckett & Farley is that there are very few architecture and engineering firms that are household names. … I was attracted to the brand. It’s over 170

years old now. I know from my history the power of brands that stand the test of time. They have intrinsic value."

Luckett & Farley's value is primarily split up amongst the design of four types of structures: distilleries, industrial, higher education and commercial/civic, Provan said.

The firm has made a particularly strong mark on the distilled spirits industry, designing distilleries across Kentucky and the Southeast. In addition to being the engineer of record for Rabbit Hole in NuLu, Luckett & Farley has worked on the Woodford Reserve Distillery and original visitor center in Versailles, Kentucky; the Jack Daniel's Distillery Campus in Lynchburg, Tennessee; and the Brown-Forman Corp. Magnolia Sawmill in Stevenson, Alabama.

But with the 150th running of the Kentucky Derby around the corner May 4, perhaps no time in history will Luckett & Farley's work have more eyeballs on it than at Churchill Downs this spring.

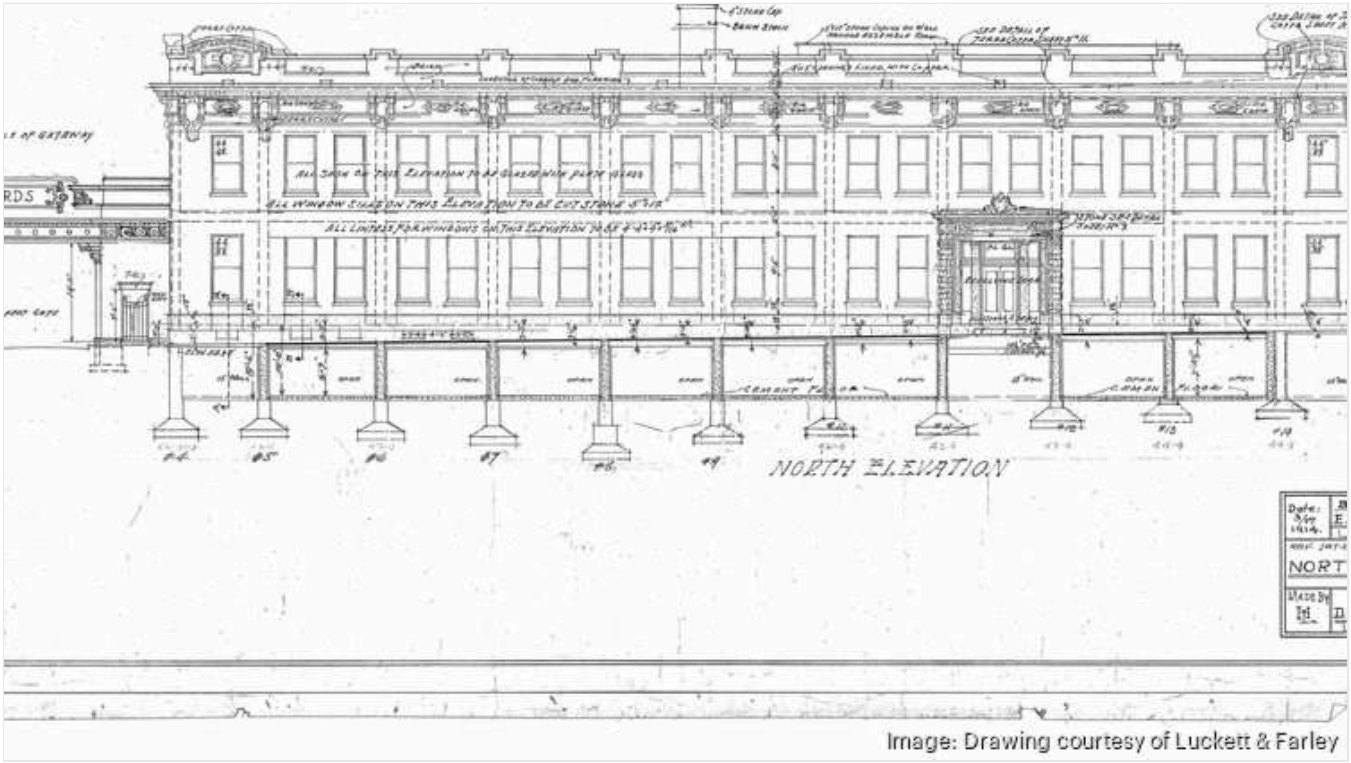
In addition to the grandstand and Twin Spires, the firm designed Churchill Downs' second paddock in 1902 and the Jockey Club in 1906. Luckett & Farley's reach extended to the track itself, redesigning the finish line and winners circle twice, in 1947 and 1973.

In 1987, the firm designed the paddock that has graced the track for the last 35 year (a new paddock will be unveiled for the 150th Kentucky Derby). Other projects since the 1990s include a renovated Gate One; a $3 million renovation of the Kentucky Derby Museum; a $127 million renovation of the clubhouse and grandstands and the addition of the Jockey Club Suites, among other improvement and expansions.

Provan said the advantage of running a firm with so much history, especially in Louisville, is the trust it creates with clients.

"People tend to trust brands that have stood the test of time. If you imagine all the ups and downs, both economic and social, of the last 170 years, I think people attach value to something that has lasted. It's so easy for us to tear stuff up," Provan said. "Obviously, that's not any good on its own if you don't maintain that trust. For us as a company to continue to be trusted and offer trustworthy service is important."

"Your reputation can't live on yesterday's work."



Designed by DX Murphy & Brothers Architects now Luckett & Farley Stock Yards Exchange Building, Louisville, KY Drawing date 1914 North & West Elevation, on Velum

DRAWING COURTESY OF LUCKETT & FARLEY

Where Luckett & Farley is headed

In order for Luckett & Farley to continue operating for another 170 years, Provan said the firm must continue to invest in its talent, because design is primarily a service business.

Part of that is understanding what role technology will play in design, he said, especially what role architects will play and what technology and help with.

Provan said that no matter how advanced artificial intelligence becomes, he believes design requires humans to convey human emotion, feel and function in structures.

“We believe our job is to bring joy to the people that experience our work,” Provan said. “How we evolve in our pursuit of that, we think will set us apart. Knowing how technology fits in that and enables and supports that is going to be critical.”

The ability to design with an eye toward conservation and plan for the long-term will also be keys to Luckett & Farley’s success, he said.

As for how it feels to drive around Louisville and see so many instances where Luckett & Farley made an impact on the city, Provan used one word: Proud.

“It matters to our employees to be able to see what they did,” Provan said. “We do some projects very far away, a lot of them. But at the end of the day, it’s the local projects that tug on the heartstrings of the people who work here.”

Luckett & Farley

Headquarters: Louisville

Year founded: 1853

Number of employees: 78

Top executives: Luckett & Farley operates as an employee-owned company, led by our executive team, including Rolf Provan as CEO and President, Jeffery Moneypenny as senior vice president, and Ariesa Wortelboer as vice president of finance.

Most recent annual revenue (if disclosed): N/A

Website: luckett-farley.com

Briefly describe what your company/organization does: Founded in 1853, Luckett & Farley’s reputation is built on its unrivaled history of solving complex challenges through design. Our team is comprised of design professionals from diverse disciplines, enabling us to provide innovative services customized to the distinct needs of each project within the built environment. With over a century and a half of experience, we firmly believe in the transformative power of design in crafting vibrant communities where citizens can thrive.

THE LIST

Louisville's Largest Architectural Firms

Local registered architects: 2023

Rank	Prior Rank	Name / Prior rank
1	1	Stengel Hill Architecture Inc.
2	2	Luckett & Farley Architects, Engineers and Construction Managers Inc.
3	3	K. Norman Berry Associates Architects PLLC

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