

COLLEY ELEVATOR CO. – 118 YEARS AND COUNTING

This Company Spotlight looks at the various ways this Chicagoland-based company is going beyond elevators to lift others.

submitted by Colley Elevator

As the elevator industry moves through consolidation, efficiencies of scale and other cost-cutting strategies, Colley Elevator Co. has been consciously moving in the opposite direction. Though still profitable and fiscally responsible, the company prioritizes its customers, employees and community above an impressive number on the bottom line. As a truly independent contractor, it has no shareholders — only stakeholders whose motivation can't always be measured in dollars.

Multinational firms, private equity and venture capital are changing the landscape of the independent elevator company market. Unfortunately, quarterly returns and return on investment are the primary goals, and executing trade work has become secondary. Colley Elevator believes in steady and

controlled growth and isn't interested in vanity projects. It strives to be the preferred service provider in the low-to-mid-rise maintenance and modernization categories in the Chicago area. This approach has worked in the company's favor as it celebrates its 118th year in business.

By not trying to outdo its competition financially, the company remains agile in responding to the needs of its community. It has an ingrained culture of giving back and boasts the intangible benefits of going beyond being simply a local contractor.

Company History

The year the first Model T left a manufacturing plant in Detroit, Colley Elevator opened its doors. The company's



AI-enhanced image of Colley Elevator's two Bensenville warehouses.

founder, C.B. Colley, was a former engineer for a large multinational elevator company. After working in all aspects of the business, he decided to strike out on his own in 1908, forming Colley Elevator Co. More than a century later, the company he founded would continue on as the longest operating independent elevator company in the Chicagoland area.

Colley Elevator was a family-owned business for more than 80 years, with the final member of the Colley family stepping down in the 1980s after a debilitating stroke. At that time, minority partner Ray Zomchek purchased the outstanding shares and ran the company as president. Today, his son, Craig, heads up the company and is the well-known face of Colley in the elevator industry (ELEVATOR WORLD, February 2018).

Throughout the 20th century, the company grew to become the third-largest independent elevator company in Illinois. Due to that growth, in 1986 it moved to its current location in Bensenville, Illinois. The company continued to acquire warehouse and office space from adjacent properties until it reached its current 28,000-ft² size. The space enables it to carry additional inventory to help service the almost 2,800 elevators in its portfolio.

Colley Elevator aims to keep inventory levels high but route numbers low. It believes that not overloading the maintenance mechanics gives them the time and resources to perform their jobs correctly. Though some would see this as a cost, the company credits it as cutting service calls and improving customer satisfaction. The logic is if you hire the best mechanics and give them the freedom to work on their elevators, you will minimize shutdowns.

Beyond Elevators – Giving Back

Philanthropic endeavors have been a part of the Colley culture for decades. In 2021, a formal program was created to give structure to a portion of the company's donations. The Colley Cares program has evolved over time and now is primarily driven by employee suggestions. Each quarter, five charities are selected from an employee-generated list to receive a percentage of modernization project sales from the prior quarter. In 2025, the company donated almost US\$20,000 to various charities, US\$12,000 of which was through Colley Cares.

Though the program is a structured approach to giving, it can be flexible based on current circumstances. The second quarter of 2026 was focused on the Illinois chapter of the Community Associations Institute's (CAI-IL) annual summer food drive. A summertime food drive helps supplement the needs of the community while school is out. It is typically a slow time since many food pantries see an uptick in donations during the end-of-the-year holidays.

This year, the association added a bit of friendly competition between several management companies; almost all were Colley customers. Colley Elevator donated on behalf of all of them with a total donation of US\$2,600. The proceeds benefited the Schaumburg Food Pantry, Housing Forward and the West Suburban Community Pantry. On the final day of competition, CAI-IL reported they had far surpassed their 25,000-meal goal, and even their adjusted 50,000 goal, with total donations funding 111,202 meals.

Besides participating in the association's yearly food drive, the company also donates to its annual Toys for Tots initiative.

Typically held in mid-October, Colley Elevator's office and field staff are called upon to compile their donations. On the final collection day, hundreds of toys are packed into a company van and delivered to the CAI-IL office.

Beyond Elevators – Education

Helping those in need is part of what separates Colley Elevator from other local contractors. Another has been educating the customer base so they may better understand their equipment. In 2021, the company launched its "Elevator 101" lunch-and-learn workshop. The course is geared toward providing community association managers and property managers with an awareness of code mandates, equipment obsolescence, preventative maintenance and capital planning for modernizations.

In 2023, "Elevator 101" was approved by the Community Association Managers International Certification Board (CAMICB) to fulfill 1 h of continuing-education requirements for the Certified Manager of Community Associations (CMCA®) certification. Two years later, the Illinois Department of Financial and Professional Regulation – Division



Members of the Northlake, Illinois, fire department attend Colley Elevator's hands-on emergency evacuation training.

of Real Estate (IDFPR) approved the course as an elective for the Community Association Manager (CAM) License.

Educating customers also takes place in the form of Colley's monthly newsletter, periodic press releases and blog. With the state of Illinois moving toward ASME 17.1 2025 adoption, the company has been extremely vocal in alerting customers to the changes. With door lock monitoring being a retroactive requirement as of the 2022 code, the company has been conveying the implications of this important safety upgrade.

Education is not only reserved for Colley's customers. On several occasions, the company has volunteered to educate members of local fire departments on proper emergency evacuation techniques per A17.4. The trainings are scheduled over the course of multiple shifts to ensure small class sizes and

guarantee that most of the department is able to attend. A primary focus is to teach attendees how to override the elevator's door restrictors to not only enable the rescue of passengers, but minimize potential damage to the elevator doors.

Beyond 2026

A goal of Colley Elevator's Managing Partner Craig Zomchek has been to build a strong foundation of employees, customers and suppliers while, at the same time, giving back to the community. His philosophy is that the elevator industry is a great trade and we are all fortunate to be a part of it. As his father so often said, "If we all give more than we get, it will always come back your way." 🌐



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