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IDEAL BUILDERS

STRONG AND LOOKING
FORWARD TO THE FUTURE

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by Mark Crawford

Dave Martin, President of Ideal Builders, closed his first deal sitting on a picnic table at the DeForest Airport.

“We had a lead about a company from Europe that needed a new building in DeForest,” says Martin. “We called their North American representative, who lived in Waunakee. We didn’t have any projects to showcase for him, but we convinced him to give us a try. It was a \$3.7-million project and we offered him a flat fee. The profit from that job allowed us to buy more tools and trucks, and paid for our first year’s overhead.”

That job in 2002 led to a profitable first year of business for Ideal Builders, which went on to complete more than \$7 million in commercial construction. Headquartered in Madison, the company has closed out over 700 projects, ranging from \$25,000 to \$43,000,000 in value. Key markets are manufacturing, retail, office, health care, medical, laboratory, warehousing, and multi-family.

“It doesn’t matter if it is new construction or a renovation,” says Martin. “We enjoy projects with a lot of detail and complexity—this is one of our core strengths and helps differentiate us from the competition. The creativity and problem-solv-



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ing necessary on this kind of project makes it very rewarding—it is much more challenging than just following a blueprint.”

Over the years Ideal Builders has built a very loyal customer base. New clients come primarily from word-of-mouth recommendations and client referrals. The company does compete on hard-bid projects but prefers design/build because the company can control the entire process, lowering risk and maximizing efficiency, scheduling, and timeline. “We work with about 10 architectural firms, all of which have different specialties and skill sets that allow us to design-build for a wide range of industries,” adds Martin.

Young and Aggressive

Martin was raised in Madison. After earning a college degree in mathematics, he worked construction throughout the Southeast as a carpenter, field superintendent, and project manager. He returned to Madison in 2000 and started on with Ideal Builders in 2002. Two years later he acquired a share of the company and became president in 2007. Martin credits his mentor, Marty Ballweg, the founder of Ideal Builders, with providing the trust and guidance to successfully lead the company. In 2008 Ideal Builders enjoyed its most prosperous year, which included the \$43-million Arbor Gate project in Madison (still its largest project to date).

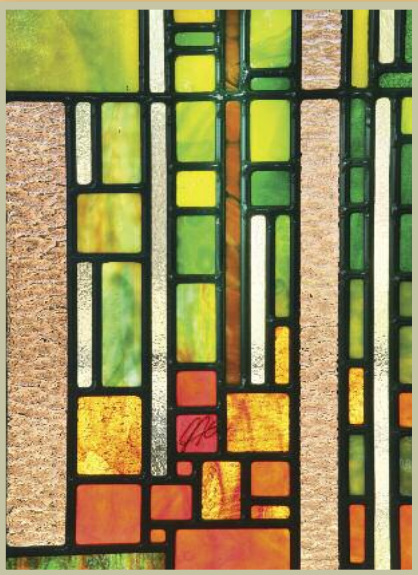
During that time the company grew rapidly and enjoyed a healthy prospective project list until the Great Recession of 2009-2010 struck, hitting the construction industry especially hard.

“As a result of fewer prospects and decreased revenue, we were forced to find ways to lower overhead expenses while increasing project profitability,” says Martin.

Strategies included fortifying accounting practices and making timely billings and collections a priority. “Paying subcontractors and vendors faster incentivized them to give us better pricing going forward,” states Martin. Project managers also did a better job of defining scope, which greatly reduced the number of conflicts and reduced guesswork for



Arbor Gate — Madison, WI



Middleton Police & Municipal Court — Middleton, WI

subcontractors and vendors. "This allowed them to confidently submit aggressive pricing without worrying that some undefined element would be added to their list," he adds

These measures and others allowed Ideal Builders to stay financially strong during the recession and avoid layoffs—a huge accomplishment, especially for a general contractor. The improvements applied to managing overhead and office/field resources are now embedded in the corporate culture; they are part of the standard way of doing business as the company moves forward, allowing them to be highly competitive as the market rebounds.

Martin is very proud of his staff's ability to create an effective team dynamic with owners, designers, and subcontractors. "Our projects are successful because every member of the team is communicating well and working together in a friendly and cooperative manner," says Martin. "The staff spends a lot of time building personal connections, as well as professional bonds. Everyone at Ideal is aware that being flexible, forthcoming, and pleasant to work with leads to smooth projects and cooperative environments."

Teamwork at Ideal Builders is also reflected by its highly successful safety program. The company's experience modification rate has been consistently below 0.8 since it was founded in 2002.

"We work with AGC as well as our insurance provider to deliver the necessary education to both our field employees and our subcontractors," says Martin. "Communication is the key in ensuring that everyone knows our high expectations when it comes to safety on the job. Every employee is empowered to stop the job if necessary because of a safety issue."

Ideal Builders has been an AGC member since 2007. "We value the legal and safety services the most," says Martin. "The safety staff at AGC helps with everything from safety training to support with OSHA. Access to legal service is also very valuable for review of contracts, legal guidance, and the preparation of legal documents. The legal and safety professionals at AGC respond quickly to

our questions with well-reasoned answers that make sense.”

Selected Projects

Arbor Gate, Madison

This design/build, Class-A, six-story office building with attached parking ramp won Daily Reporter’s “top project” recognition in 2008. The \$43-million, 212,000-square foot project consisted of demolition, site development, core and shell construction of two buildings, and erecting a 599-car precast parking structure connected by two, three-story skybridges to the office building. The project was completed in 13 months; at peak construction there were over 120 workers on-site.

“Ideal Builders brought a lot of experience to the table, from initial design to close out,” indicates Sean Baxter, president of Westwind, the developer. “They helped us with design and costs, well before any contract had been signed. The fact this was their largest project was of no concern for us. Their value engineering saved us about 10 percent on the budget and it was always clear they wanted the very best for us as the client.”

Middleton Police & Municipal Court, Middleton

Over ten contractors bid on this \$8-million, 52,000-square-foot police and municipal court building. Features include booking/holding areas, evidence processing and storage rooms, high clearstory areas, underground parking stalls with heated concrete apron, 24/7 dispatch center, and a gym. A vast amount of rich walnut millwork detail and design, as well as customized stained-glass windows, add an elegant touch.

“I will admit that I was concerned at first by the youthful appearance of the management staff assigned to our project,” says Brad Keil, Chief of Police for the City of Middleton. “That quickly disappeared after attending my first few construction meetings. It was obvious they were very capable of meeting our needs. Ken Kessenich, the foreman, approached the project as if he was working on his own home. His commitment to quality and customer service was first-class. Our facility is now viewed as a model for other



Humbucker Apartments — Madison, WI



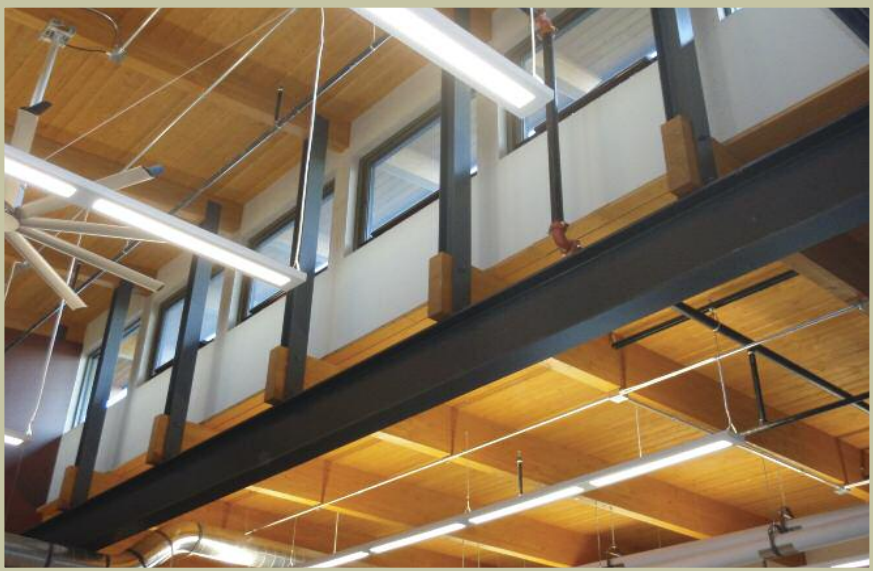
public safety agencies that are considering designing and building a new facility.”

Humbucker Apartments, Madison

This privately owned student housing complex for University of Wisconsin students is located near Camp Randall Stadium. The 98,000-square-foot, nine-story building was completed in ten months and ready for student move-in August 2011. Features include 75 apartments and below-grade parking. The pre-cast concrete components were shipped from Beloit and assembled on-site.

Value engineering resulted in the selection of closet organizer systems without doors instead of closets. “After exploring the idea with the project team we decided to omit the traditional closet and provide contemporary built-in shelving/organizer systems,” says senior project manager Travis Dettinger. “This saved cost, minimized future maintenance, and, as we found out, was a feature that tenants loved.”

“Ideal Builders was very straightforward and easy to deal with,” says Otto Gebhardt, President of Gebhardt Development, owner of the apartment building. “There were no problems with change orders and they came in on budget and ahead of schedule. These guys are the complete package.”



Green Ttec, Village of Plain

The Village of Plain hired Ideal Builders to construct Green Ttec, a 14,000-square-foot, LEED-certified, green technology training and incubator facility. Environmentally friendly features include photo-voltaic power generation equipment, 14 geo-well field with heat pump HVAC, Glu-lam construction, and insulated panels. The project was completed in five months.

“The building was designed to showcase sustainable building systems and practices,” comments Shawn Murphy, Green Ttec director. “It is not a conventional business design, so it required a lot of knowledge and attention to detail. We also had a very aggressive timeline. Ideal Builders was very accommodating and worked very well with our team—communication was outstanding and they did a great job on the project.”



Green Ttec — Village of Plain, WI



**Dean Clinic
Orthopedic Center —**
Madison, WI



Dean Clinic Orthopedic Center, Madison

Located on the sixth floor of Arbor Gate, this 14,848-square-foot clinic and office opened June 2011. The project required fast-track construction schedule and was completed in less than three months. Highlights include curvilinear soffiting, natural daylighting, rehabilitation gym, treatment rooms, physician offices, exam rooms, and two outdoor patios.

“Our staff loves the new space,” reports Justin B. Hanel, Corporate Project Manager for Dean Clinic. “Ideal did a great job on big project with a short timeline. They never missed a deadline and always kept us up-to-date with their progress.

A Promising Future

Ideal Builders is known for actively managing its projects. “We are small enough that we can dedicate all the time and attention that’s needed,” says Martin. “Owners frequently comment that we seem to be more in control of our projects than other general contractors. We are constantly communicating goals and expectations to everyone on the team, including the owner. We do everything possible to ensure owners feel they received fair treatment, great value, and the quality of construction was high.”

Martin is in no hurry to get bigger. “We’re very comfortable with our current size from a staff and facilities standpoint,” he says. The company is well-positioned to increase revenue by 20-30 percent in

the next five years—with probable expansion into the health care, senior housing, and assisted living markets.

“Our sales team has been very effective in identifying projects that are good opportunities for our company,” says Martin. “We’re focusing on fewer leads, but giving those leads better attention and procuring better-suited projects. 2011 has been a good year—we are financially strong and looking forward to future growth.” ■

Ideal Builders has been a member of the AGC of Wisconsin since 2007.