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ISSUE 2 • 2009



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ISSUE 2 • 2009

Official publication of the

## Associated General Contractors of Wisconsin

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**Rich Lynch**  
2009 AGC of Wisconsin President

*In challenging economic times like today, we must embrace new models of partnership.*

## Message from the **PRESIDENT**

# A Philosophy of Partnership

In 1918, President Woodrow Wilson was called upon to help lead our nation through some very challenging times. Issues related to World War I and a flu pandemic caused great concerns for the country and significantly impacted all U.S. citizens on many different levels. It was during this time our President recognized the construction industry's national importance and desired a partner with which the government could discuss and plan for the advancement of the nation. As a result, the Associated General Contractors (AGC) was founded to provide a unified voice for the construction industry, representing general contractors, specialty contractors and materials suppliers.

Nearly one century later, 2009 is also proving to be a challenging time for our country. Economic recession and record unemployment levels are challenging every industry, including the construction industry, to rethink, rework and retool the way business is done. In this time of uncertainty, much like in 1918, the construction industry needs to come together and work in partnership to make survival and rebuilding possible.

A philosophy of partnership is not new to contractors. We already rely on each other to bring our respective expertise to projects. General contractors cannot succeed without the trade-specific skills that subcontractors bring to a pro-

ject. General contractors provide the necessary schedule and budget coordination for building owners, ensuring projects are completed on-time and within budget. And of course, as AGC General Contractors, we all collaborate through our association toward the best practices and policies that impact our future success.

However, in challenging economic times like today, we must project a positive image and embrace new models of partnership that include respect, integrity and creative solutions.

### **Respect**

Many of us have spent our entire careers in the construction industry. Many of us chose construction because of the tremendous personal satisfaction in seeing our hard work change skylines and shape the communities in which we live. At the end of each day, we can see, touch, and feel what we have done. We each enjoy seeing and sharing with our families the physical shapes that our efforts leave behind. If you take time to remember that every individual in our great industry has the same desire...to make a difference...then respect becomes an easy practice. Each employee, subcontractor, supplier and all of our friends on the design side of our industry all share these same feelings. Respecting our peers in challenging times like today is critical to survival.

### **Integrity**

In his last column, AGC Executive Vice President Bob Barker shared with us some concerning examples of behavior that lack integrity...one being bid shopping...which is both unethical and bad for our industry's image. The public looks at us as one industry, not individual companies. Behaviors lacking integrity impact more than just the contractors directly involved...they cast a dark shadow over the whole industry. The State of Wisconsin looks to the AGC as a unified voice repre-

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senting the many facets of the construction industry. In order to advance our industry, we must think about how our actions impact the industry as a whole. The behaviors of a few become the reputation of many. And as business people we understand that we only get one shot at respect...and our reputations. Our business attitudes and behavior impact our industry's ability to maintain a strong relationship with the public, which is critical for our legislative and workforce development efforts. When you think outside your office walls and remember that every decision your company makes has an impact on our whole industry, integrity becomes an easy solution.

**Creative Solutions**

Each one of us understands and accepts the strong competitive nature of our business. Yet, like the Three Musketeers, we should operate our businesses under a unified motto of "All for One and One for All". Not one of our companies can make it through

this challenging time without the support of each other. This is a time when companies must focus on creative solutions to handling challenges. The building boom of the recent past has left many of us perhaps more complacent to be more reactionary than proactive. And it is true that "good times mask many of the tougher decisions". Understanding that everyone is facing new challenges today requires each company to find new ways to plan for solutions. In many cases, these solutions are most successful with the support and involvement of our peers.

Experts have mixed predictions on when the economy, financial industry and unemployment will rebound to early 2000 levels. Your guess is as good as mine...I don't have that answer either. What I do know is that our company and our industry cannot succeed in this challenging time alone. Let's work together through our great AGC organization to send the public a unified voice that this is a unified industry that will once again rise to the occasion to build America into the future. ■



To learn more about membership, contact  
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**608-221-3821**

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**Clarification to President's column in Issue 1, 2009**

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**Bob Barker**  
AGC of Wisconsin  
Executive Vice President

Message from the **EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT**

## Apathy Will Kill Your Business

A recent survey of 543 company CEOs ranked Wisconsin in the top 10 of the WORST states for job growth and business. California, New York and Michigan were the worst, followed by New Jersey, Massachusetts, New York, Wisconsin, Hawaii, Ohio and Louisiana. The CEOs cited punitive government regulation, tax policies, and unionization as primary factors in their rankings.

The regulatory, tax and legal environments in Wisconsin and Washington D.C. are taking a turn for the worse. Small and large businesses are under attack from the Wisconsin legislature and Congress. Here are some examples of how the Wisconsin legislature is attempting to make business operations and survival more difficult:

**Senate Bill 20** – 2009 Wisconsin Act 20 amends the Wisconsin Fair Employment Act (“WFEA”) by permitting complainants in employment discrimination, unfair genetic testing, and unfair honesty testing cases to seek and to be awarded compensatory and punitive damages. Under the former version of the WFEA, employees were only entitled to attorney fees and “make whole” remedies, such as back pay, front pay or reinstatement. This law marks a significant change in Wisconsin employment law, and is likely to increase the amount of employment litigation before the Wisconsin Equal Rights Division (“ERD”) and Wisconsin state courts, as well as create significant additional costs for employers

**Joint & Several Liability** – Grassroots efforts convinced the Leadership Caucus to remove this from the Budget Bill. However, we expect the trial lawyers to propose this again in the next session, and the trial lawyers have friends in the legislature.

This proposal will create legal traps never before seen in Wisconsin, and go far beyond reverting to Wisconsin law prior to the 1995 reforms. Specifically, if enacted, these laws would: 1) Allow someone with as little as 1% fault to pay 100% of the damages. 2) Allow someone more at fault to sue those less at fault. 3) Create a legal fiction where someone that is 1% at fault *in fact* is 100% at fault *under the law*.

Stay tuned for more on this issue.

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**Elimination of Disregarded Entities for the Purchase of Materials for Tax Exempt Entities** – AGC has long advocated for a change in tax laws which allow tax exempt entities such as schools, churches, etc. to take full advantage of their tax exempt status. Contractors responded to the lack of action at the Capitol by forming separate companies to manage the process so their clients were able to receive their appropriate tax exemptions. This is another attempt by the government to get tax revenue from entities/your clients that are tax exempt.

**“ELECTIONS HAVE CONSEQUENCES”** This is the saying of the times by the political pundits on television. We are finding out this is entirely true.

It is amazing how apathetic the majority of contractors are about politics and the political process. This is true in Wisconsin; and symptomatic

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of contractors throughout the country, especially in the building industry.

It is understandable. Most folks dislike politics and politicians. However, simple grass roots efforts of writing letters to legislators and the Governor carry about as much weight as political contributions. AGC attempts to facilitate this through our Legislative Action Center but far too many contractors com-

plain but choose not to act.

Apathy will kill your business and the businesses of your clients. ■



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# McKee Associates

## FORTY-FIVE YEARS OF BUILDING SUCCESS

by Mark Crawford

McKee Associates, Inc., a Madison-based construction management services firm, has specialized in light commercial, retail, restaurant and residential construction since 1964. Buildings include new office complexes, multi-family (typically under four stories), remodeling projects of all sizes, office space and retail build-outs.

This diversification of markets has led to “steady growth over the last 45 years,” says Vice President Brian McKee. “We have been fortunate in recent economic times to have maintained a steady and even increasing sales volume. Revenues have averaged about \$12 million per year in commercial construction and a combined \$18-\$20 million when development and single-family industries are included.”

A significant portion of the revenue stream is building restaurants for national chains such as McDonalds and Chili’s. McKee Associates has also worked with other national chains such as Taco Bell and Pizza Hut. McKee’s restaurant division works in five states in the Midwest. Over the years, it has constructed nearly 100 new McDonalds restaurants, remodeled well over 300 restaurants in their 35 years of working with the chain and recently started building projects for Chili’s.

“Restaurants present their own set of challenges; one of the most crucial is their fast timelines,” says Brian. “One client, for example, allows 90 days from groundbreaking to store opening. This is also the same for rebuilds where the existing store needs to stay open while the new store is under construction.”

**ABOVE: Chapel Valley Senior Housing** — Fitchburg, WI

## In the Beginning

Bill McKee, a carpenter by trade, founded McKee Associates in 1964 and currently serves as the company president (he is also a past national director of the National Association of Home Builders, past president of the Madison Area Builders Association and served two terms as a director of the Associated General Contractors of Wisconsin). By the early 1970's, Bill and his wife Jan grew their small carpentry contractor business into a full construction management services company that joined Midwest Homes, Inc., a custom home builder in south central Wisconsin they founded in 1969.

Their son Brian and daughter Melissa represent the second generation of leadership in the company. Both worked with their parents during their high school years and gained a lasting appreciation for construction and the business. Now a Vice President, Brian graduated from the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater with degrees in finance and real estate development and later took over the residential company, Midwest Homes, in 1993. Melissa, Vice President and Office/IT Manager, joined the firm after graduating from the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater with a degree in business administration and Spanish.

"We both learned a multitude of different aspects of the business from our summer work," says Brian. "By starting out on entry-level jobs and slowly progressing through the different levels up to management, our long-term employees see that we have put in the time and are part of the team, rather than just being handed a job."

The McKee Family admits that blending family roles and work roles was challenging at first and required some adjustments. "Our Children Brian and Melissa have been involved full time for 18 years and 8 years part time prior to that, which is almost half of our 45 years in business," says Jan McKee.

Both Brian and Melissa have stepped up the pace of looking for and bidding work, as well as managing the design/bid projects that are the core of the business. They also tend to be more technology-aware than their parents. "As times and techniques change, we

need to stay current with technologies and software," points out Melissa McKee.

The McKees have worked hard to create a strong "family" atmosphere between management and employees. Several key employees have been with the company for more than 25 years. "One thing that demonstrates the family feel of our organization is that on occasion our key employees have been 'shopped' by competitors and even by a client, and each time the offers have been declined," says Bill McKee. "It is a tribute to the quality of our staff that they are asked; however they show their commitment to us when they stay, and we are honored that they choose to remain within our 'family.'"

"Our parents used to tell us, 'If you don't have the time to do it right the first time, when are you going to have time to do it over?'" says Brian McKee. "This idea is at the core of our culture and integral to our overall phi-

losophy of business. We are careful not to overgrow our capabilities or compromise our reputation for providing a high-quality project."

"McKee Associates are good people," says Paul Jakel, president of Jakel Plumbing in Abbotsford, a long-term subcontractor for McKee. "They go out of their way to accommodate their subs. They are very organized. If they say it is going to happen, it will happen."

Don Steele, president Steele Construction Corporation in Madison, agrees. "We have done drywall and metal-stud framing for McKee for at least 20 years," says Steele. "What impresses me most, especially in today's economy, is their efficiency. When they call, you know you'll be able to get in and get the job done uninterrupted. There's never a glitch. An outstanding work ethic runs through the family."



**Dental Health Associates/South** — Madison, WI



**Condos** — Wisconsin Dells, WI



**Fort Dells McDonalds** — Wisconsin Dells, WI



**Dental Health Associates/East** — Madison, WI

## Top-Notch Workforce

The McKee management team of project superintendents and construction managers has over 200 years of accumulated experience in construction throughout the Midwest and supervises a deeply experienced carpentry labor force.

"We are proud of the team of employees we have built," says Melissa. "I think everyone feels like part of a team rather than just an employee. We have extremely low turnover, which leads to improved safety on the job and a higher quality of product."

Every employee is encouraged to offer suggestions to clients about their projects. "This allows us to use our teams' experience and expertise to better satisfy our clients true needs," says Brian. "It may be something as simple as rearranging a reception area in a doctor's office to improve functionality and better space utilization while maintaining a welcoming feel and staying within budget. Or it could be something as substantial as changing the position of a building on a site to offer better street appeal as well as spatial optimization to offer as much green space as possible on the site."

McKee employees have compiled an impressive safety record—over the last five years the company's mod rate has been a very low .75. "We empower each superintendent to be responsible for the safety of their jobsite," says Bill. "This makes them more mindful of unsafe practices."

McKee Associates has been a member of the AGC since 1990. "We appreciate the services AGC offers from its' safety and educational programs to its' legislative and legal work for the advancement of the construction industry" states Bill. McKee Associates utilizes the safety updates and training sessions provided by AGC of Wisconsin and the Madison Area Builder's Association. It also holds weekly jobsite safety meetings and safety training from vendors and suppliers on the best ways to operate equipment and tools. "Our insurance agent's safety expert visits our office and jobsites to improve our overall safety initiative," says Melissa.

Management is also committed to training carpentry apprentices. A



**Dental Health Associates/Childrens** — Madison, WI

McKee Associates' carpenter can work his way from foreman to superintendent or construction manager. "We encourage our staff to take training on software updates, business practices, etc. so they continue to build their skill sets," says Jan.

"McKee Associates is a pleasure to work for," states Dave Cooper, an estimator and wetland manager for W & D Navis in Waupun. "They have a very professional workforce and great leadership on site. Not only have I built good working relationships with them, but lasting friendships as well."

The relationships, developed by McKee Associates with subcontractors, contribute to the reason they were nominated multiple times for the AGC of Wisconsin's Contractor of the Year award. They were honored with this award three times since 2000. These awards are especially meaningful to the McKee Family as they are voted on by the specialty contractor members of the AGC of WI. "It is evident from receiving these awards that our subcontractors also feel like they are part of our team and shows that our business philosophy is appreciated by those we work with," says Brian.

## Selected Projects

### **Dental Health Associates, Madison**

McKee Associates has completed several projects for this group, including a new 29,000-square-foot Fitchburg clinic/headquarters and complete remodels for the West Madison and East Madison clinics. "The remodels presented a unique challenge because the clinics needed to remain open, functional, and clean for their clients," says Bill. "The remodels were done in stages, sectioning off the buildings to remodel one part at a time."

At the West Madison location, Construction Manager Mike Haas helped design and then managed the construction of the 30,000-square-foot remodel/addition for a building that DHA purchased in which a bank branch continued to operate. The design included 13 new patient rooms, centralized sterilization area, darkroom, offices, and a basement for storage. The building had to be underpinned to excavate for the basement and new elevator shaft that had to be added to the building. Because the parking lot had to remain open, equipment and material were lowered into the excavation with

cranes. Contaminated soils encountered during excavation had to be dealt with in accordance with regulations. The bank remained in operation during the entire building process, including the drive-through windows.

"It didn't matter what Mike was juggling, he always met the needs of our organization," says Sara Crowley, clinic administrator. "The crew was amazing. The subcontractors were great. I can dial Mike's number by heart—I can't say that with many other vendors. McKee Associates totally delivered."

### **Fort Dells McDonalds, Wisconsin Dells**

"We have worked on numerous McDonalds restaurants for Missoula Mac over the years," says Melissa. "These have included new buildings, remodels of all sizes, and office and storage facilities." Located on the site of the old Fort Dells Amusement Park from the 1950s, Fort Dells McDonald's was designed to look like a log cabin, complete with a 28-foot-tall stone fireplace, timber-frame trusses, abundant woodwork, and mounted animal heads, including a moose with a 62-



**Chili's** — Plover, WI



**Econoprint Headquarters** — Verona, WI



**L'eft Bank Wine** — McFarland, WI

inch rack – not your typical McDonald's.

"The project was completed from groundbreaking to store opening in 84 days with zero 'punch list' items," says Construction Manager Mike McLyman. "An average-size store is normally completed in about 90 days. This one, at 6,000 square feet, was twice the normal size."

"Construction Managers James Lehr, Mike McLyman, and the rest of the crew were totally dedicated to quality and did a great job," comments Mike Mangin, Vice President of Missoula Mac, which owns and operates 42 McDonalds restaurants in the Madison area (most of which were built by McKee Associates).

#### ***Chili's, Plover and Oconomowoc***

Word-of-mouth brought this relatively new client to McKee Associates. "These projects came to us through a former McDonalds regional construction manager who hired on with Bridgeman Foods, a franchisee company for Chili's, and then recommended us," McLyman indicates.

With a restaurant/bar configuration and much more kitchen equipment, Chili's represented a more complex restaurant project for McKee Associates. Even so, "we completed the two new construction projects faster, and with fewer punch-list items, than previous contractors who had built the same product for Chili's," says McLyman. This led to McKee Associates negotiating for a third new restaurant, which will be constructed in the greater Milwaukee area.

#### ***Four Lakes Properties, McFarland***

This project consisted of McKee Associates constructing a new 18,000-square-foot warehouse. Later, when the tenant's business expanded, McKee Associates was asked to expand and remodel the building to a total of 22,500 square feet. The principal tenant is L'eft Bank Wine, a wine distributor. The building is completely climate controlled to protect the wine inventory.

"The upstairs office space is connected to the main-floor conference room and basement wine cellar with a spiral staircase," says Haas. "A restaurant-quality kitchen was installed for

wine-tasting events. The loading dock was designed to be large enough to allow trucks to load inside in bad weather. The exterior is very sharp-looking with Nucor steel panels and split-block masonry."

### **Ward Brodt Music Company, Madison**

Owner Michael Faulhaber hired McKee Associates in 2005 to undertake a 30,000-square-foot renovation of his music store, including building sound rooms. Faulhaber worked with a designer on the overall design and collaborated with Mike Haas to fine-tune the details. "Because Michael had to keep his business open during construction with a minimum of disturbance, we had to do the work one section at the time," says Haas.

"Haas is a great guy who doesn't waste time," says Faulhaber. "He builds stuff. He fixes stuff. He communicates well and has excellent follow-through. If there is a problem, he gets the right guys to fix it. Since it was an older building, we encountered a lot of code violations that needed to be upgraded, but that didn't slow us down. And the clean-up was exceptional. By the end of the day, when the private lessons started, the tools were put away, the place was safe, and there was no dust."

### **Looking to the Future**

McKee Associates' core business philosophy will never change: Be honest, listen carefully to each client's needs and desires, and treat employees and clients with respect.

"We always provide clients with the best possible value for their dollar by looking out for their interests, as well as our own," says Jan. "We strive to deliver the highest quality, while staying within their budgetary and timeline requirements." This dedication to customer satisfaction is a big reason why McKee Associates has such a solid base of repeat business.

"We are always on the lookout for advances in technology that will improve our business, including the latest design/drafting software and three-dimensional computer modeling," says Melissa. "There are always advances with green building. Clients are looking for more green features.



**Ward Brodt Music Company** — Madison, WI

Wherever possible we suggest utilizing green design and energy efficient materials into the building structures, high-efficiency heating and cooling systems such as geothermal, and other energy-saving equipment, while still maintaining cost effectiveness. Clients are pleased that we are looking out for their businesses' bottom line and not just the budget of the project."

Despite the challenging economy, McKee Associates has seen a slight increase in the volume of projects to bid, although the scope and budgets of the projects still seem to be reduced." With the fluctuation in pricing for some products, we need to offer the client alternatives they might not have thought of before," adds Brian. "Also, with less work out there due to economic conditions, there are more bidders looking at the same projects and it's quite possible to lose a job by a few

dollars, depending on how much someone is willing to work for bottom dollar to cover costs only."

Overall, the McKee family is proud of their company's longevity. "To be in business for 45 years and survive the ups and downs of the economy and business cycles is a great accomplishment," says Bill. "One key to our success is the diversity of the construction industries we work in and the large geographical area we cover. Often if commercial work is slow, the housing industry will pick up; when housing is slow, multi-family and restaurant construction will pick up. We will also continue to look for new opportunities in emerging markets that complement our goals and expertise." ■

*McKee Associates, Inc. has been a member of the AGC of Wisconsin since 1990.*

## H&H Industries

H&H Industries began as W.J. Hyland in 1901 and is now an affiliate of H&H Group, with five affiliates offering HVAC, Plumbing, Electrical and Solar Technologies. H&H Group includes H&H Industries, H&H Electric and H&H Solar Energy Services, based in Madison, Wisconsin and Magaw Electric and Magaw Electric Construction based in New Berlin and Sturtevant, Wisconsin, respectively.

One hundred years has brought many changes and improvements. Mike Christensen, President of H&H Industries, has spearheaded the largest growth for H&H Industries, turning a fledgling HVAC contractor in 1994, with \$5 million in revenue, into one of the largest mechanical contractors in Southern Wisconsin. In the last eight to ten years, annual revenues have consistently been \$25 to \$30 million. This growth has evolved from several factors. Accurate estimating, experienced project management and state-of-the-art sheet metal fabrication laid the initial ground work for expansion. Not content to rest, H&H made a substantial investment in the latest BIM modeling technology and educating staff how to best apply this technology to estimating, production and project management. Combined with a 3D AutoCAD department, H&H is able to take a project from electronic

drawings through the entire construction process without putting pen to paper. This process provides accurate drawings, creates a minimum amount of waste and develops maximum job-site efficiency. Software for BIM modeling is constantly updated for both the extensive sheet metal and pipefitting facilities and the estimating department generating material lists.

LEED work and energy efficiency have become major components of H&H Industries' repertoire. Recent LEED accredited projects include the Hillel Center for the University of Wisconsin, Eppstein Uhen Architectural offices, Holy Wisdom Monastery, Cross Plains Library and most notably the Aldo Leopold Legacy Center (ALLC) in Baraboo. The ALLC is a zero energy, carbon neutral facility that produces 113% of the power it uses annually. HVAC systems were designed to operate at the highest efficiencies possible. Nineteen geothermal wells feed into five ground source heat pumps that provide radiant floor heating and cooling. Void of chillers, boilers and forced air furnaces, the Legacy Center uses a sophisticated weather station and interior sensors, plus occupant participation to provide a comfortable interior climate year round. Humidity sensors and a state of the art control system prevent con-

densation during cooling periods. Fresh air for the ALLC is provided by windows which can be opened and also by a unique "earth tube" field, consisting of five 100' rows of 24" diameter concrete piping backfilled under 8' of sand. A low speed fan pulls fresh air through the field to a UV light and filter before it enters in-floor ductwork. The Center was awarded sixty one of a possible sixty nine LEED points by the U.S. Green Building Council, making it the highest LEED Certified Platinum building in the world – to date.

The Associated General Contractors is a major player in the Wisconsin contracting industry. The AGC has helped fight many battles regarding legislation that would directly affect the health of a vibrant industry that keeps thousands of people at work. From recommending and endorsing political candidates to lobbying against regulations that are useless or impede growth, AGC has developed into a welcome ally for H&H Industries and others.

It has been an interesting ride for Mike Christensen. In his words, "pluck and luck" brought him from a Steamfitter Apprentice, up through the ranks to his current position as President of H&H Industries. By understanding the assets and talents of existing staff and continuing to pursue and apply the latest technologies to the mechanical trade, H&H Industries has risen to its position of prominence among HVAC contractors in Wisconsin. ■



Heat pumps at the Aldo Leopold Legacy Center in Baraboo.



[www.hhindustries.com](http://www.hhindustries.com)

*H&H Industries has been a Specialty Contractor member of the AGC of Wisconsin since 1998.*

# DEAR BARRY,

**Q** *Recently I have had frequent requests to provide valued engineering for my section of work. Most of these requests have been an effort from the GC to cut cost from the budget. Is this a common practice? I thought this is why architects and engineers are hired.*

**A** Valued engineering often occurs after a job is bid and is found to be over budget. When the owner needs to trim cost, most value engineering is carried out by the architect or engineer after meetings with the owner to determine what the owner can live with on a scaled down version of the project. Generally, a specialty contractor will see this request in the form of an RFI, Request for Information, with a change in the scope of work and or specifications. Value engineering is always a directive from the owner to get help from the GC and the specialty contractor to look for and present ways to cut cost without cheapening the project.

**Q** *That is what I thought, however; recently I was approached by the GC of a project to provide value engineering for my section of work. That person made it sound like I was in the running with one other contractor for the work and if I could reduce my cost by providing value engineering I might be awarded the work. Something seemed uncomfortable about the request and I declined to provide a lower price or value engineering as requested. Two days later I received the contract.*

**A** Good call. Sometimes we encounter people, GC's, who don't subscribe to ethical standards that AGC members embrace. Some GC's will look for ways to take advantage of a specialty contractor by using the term value engineering for their own gain. The owner of that project you were asked about may have been fine with the price and the specifications, but the GC was looking for an angle to line its pocket with a fatter bank role.

**Q** *How do I know what is a legitimate request for value engineering and what is not?*

**A** Ask Questions. The best way to diffuse your fear is to ask questions of the person requesting information.

Remember, most requests for value engineering are legitimate and if you ask the right questions you can verify that legitimacy.

**Q** *What questions would you suggest?*

**A** Ask for clarification by requesting a dialogue with the architect or engineer to discuss this. Any opposition should raise a red flag; free flowing information is a green flag. You can choose from that point on whether to continue or not.

As a Specialty Contractor you know your product and service better than anyone. You understand the pitfalls and the benefits of the products you use and how to use them. Sometimes architects and engineers do not fully understand these nuances because they are not in the trenches where the real value is created. They rely on information from manufacturers sales representatives who try to convince them that they have the greatest thing since sliced bread. Often that is the only information architects and engineers have available to them.

True value engineering is a request for information from you, the expert in the field, because you deal with these products and installation difficulties every day. My suggestion to you then is to be true to your knowledge and understanding of your product limitations and the limitations of your crews. Do not over sell or under sell; state the facts as you understand them from your experience and wisdom.

**Q** *That makes sense, but what do I do if I get the red flag but I really need the work?*

**A** If you get the red flag just know that you are going to have to make sure that all your dialogue with this GC is documented with fair language and signatures before you agree to proceed with your work.

Stephan Covey Jr. writes in his book *The Speed of Trust* that there is a quantitative difference between speeds at which work can get done between customers and clients who have a high level of trust for each other and those that have little or no trust. Trust = higher profit, more satisfied clients, and more opportunity. As you review an AGC's member commitment to the industry, you learn that Skill, Integrity and Responsibility are the expectation. It is up to you, the members, to live up to these high standards.



*Barry Cade*

Have a Best Practices question for Barry?  
E-mail: [BarryCade@agcwi.org](mailto:BarryCade@agcwi.org)

## Hausmann-Johnson Insurance

Insurance and bonding are similar in many ways. Understanding contractors, their methods, their risks and their needs are critical in developing a comprehensive risk management plan or negotiating with a surety. Knowledge, experience and being innovative are paramount to a successful insurance and bond relationship.

Beginning in 1946, Phil Hausmann founded Hausmann Insurance. The insurance operations continued to grow, focusing on the construction, manufacturing and service sectors of the business community. Nearby, the Norman E. Johnson Agency began primarily as a contractor bond agency in 1955. It continued to evolve into a large construction oriented bond and property casualty insurance agency.

In 2002, a merger of two strong insurance agencies in Madison resulted in the formation of Hausmann-Johnson Insurance. The company has a long history within the construction community and with the AGC of Wisconsin. For more than 60 years, Hausmann-Johnson has been a bond and insurance provider to the construction marketplace.

The two agencies complimented each other well after the merger. The main principals involved with that merger – Fritz, Jeff and Tim Hausmann along with Steve Squires – remain active today with Hausmann-Johnson Insurance.

With the 2008 opening of a branch

office in Milwaukee, Hausmann-Johnson has nearly 70 employees. They are a full service insurance agency, providing surety bonds, property-casualty, employee benefits, life, 401k and personal lines insurance.

Hausmann-Johnson has specialized in serving the construction community since inception. A distinguishing factor is that Hausmann-Johnson has had a full service bond department for nearly 60 years. Hausmann-Johnson's philosophy is for each of their employees to specialize in one specific area such as property/casualty insurance, surety bonds, benefits, loss control or claims. Each employee is required to continue their education and development to be a leader in their field.

That specialization has led Hausmann-Johnson to develop processes and procedures that focus on and meet their client's needs. Their approach is to create an ease of doing business that focuses on servicing their client's needs first.

Hausmann-Johnson's approach is to partner with their clients and establish long term relationships. That partnering approach has worked well throughout the years as they have maintained and enhanced long term relationships with many AGC of Wisconsin Members.

Partnering with general contractors, subcontractors, specialty contractors and street and road contractors,

Hausmann-Johnson specializes in managing the total cost of risk for their clients, which maximizes bottom line profitability. With proprietary consulting tools, Hausmann-Johnson helps to evaluate and uncover the potential risks and hazards its' clients face each day. With that, they formulate a plan to best handle each specific scenario to not only protect the business, but to help it improve it's bottom line.

Hausmann-Johnson applies the partnering approach to their insurance and bond carrier relationships. Hausmann-Johnson realizes with their specialization, there are few carriers who write construction risks. Instead of striving offer lines through a wide spectrum of carriers, they place priority on select carrier relationships and work to be the top agency with each of those carriers. They utilize this partnership to develop stronger programs while establishing competitive pricing for their clients.

Hausmann-Johnson has been an active supporter of many construction associations, specifically the AGC of Wisconsin. Their commitment to the AGC is a way to remain up-to-date with contractor's needs and practices, as well as to give back to the construction industry. Pat McKenna, Director of Surety, has been a member of the AGC Legislative Committee for 12 years and also has served on several ad hoc committees with the AGC.

Construction is a very specialized field and Hausmann-Johnson's knowledge and experience in the industry are critical for their clients. Innovative techniques that help manage overhead, make contractors more attractive to owners and improve overall job profitability. With more than 60 years of experience, Hausmann-Johnson is well poised to serve contractors' insurance and bonding needs. ■



*Hausmann-Johnson Insurance has been an Associate Member of the AGC of Wisconsin since 1989.*

# AGC of Wisconsin Hosts PMDP



AGC of Wisconsin was pleased to host the new Project Manager Development Program (PMDP), a new five unit curriculum developed by AGC of America. The program met for five sessions that were each two days in length. The following individuals completed the PMDP in May and received their certificate for the advanced training.

**Back Row, from left:** Instructor Mike Galloy; Linda Danielski, The Boldt Company; Doddie Regenold, Staab Construction Corp.; Ben Hager, J.H. Findorff & Son; Teresa Duerst, Tri-North Builders; Mike Ritter, Wingra Construction Co.; Justin Geissler, Market & Johnson, Inc.

**Front Row, from left:** Dave Jarosz, Monona Plumbing & Fire Protection; Eric Smithback, General Heating & Air Conditioning; Nate Sparbel, The Boson Co.; Tina Morris, Tri-North Builders

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**Scott B. Tracy**  
Clifton Gunderson LLP

## FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

# A Financial Check-Up for Construction Companies

Take time now to examine your company's financial health.

The current economic situation presents an excellent opportunity for self-examination in the construction industry. While economists, politicians and industry analysts continue to tinker with taxes and clear the way for massive infrastructure spending, construction company executives should be stepping back and asking themselves if they have a true picture of what drives their company's profits. Now is when builders and contractors need timely analysis of their financial data in order to formulate more effective strategic plans.

### Taking a Closer Look at the Numbers

It's easy to overlook regular finan-

cial check-ups when business is good, cash is plentiful and risks are minimal. But when indicators are down and the prospects of improvement are mixed, focused financial analysis is a vital strategic planning tool.

Understanding true financial performance, and the ability to survive an economic downturn, means looking at the factors that drive profits. Unfortunately, some companies do not have the internal expertise or resources to do this.

Most companies can generate basic financial information, including all the standard ratios and data. The next step is to understand what the numbers mean and to actually use the information for strategic planning.

Financial analysis is most useful when accompanied by the interpretation of an experienced financial professional. This experience and insight can change numbers into tangible indicators of where the company has been, where it is today, and where it is heading, or might be heading, in the future.

### Begin with Benchmarking

One of the best ways to get a handle on financial performance is with benchmarking, which is simply a measurement of a company's successes against those of its competitors. How a company stacks up to its peers is the starting point for revenue projections, budgeting and goal-setting throughout the organization.

The quality of input data is critical. Construction Financial Management Association's annual Construction Industry Annual Financial Survey is among the best.

### Look at "What If" Scenarios

Once a real life business scenario has played out, the outcome can not be changed. However, the use of "what if" analysis provides a risk-free avenue for exploring different plans and determining which outcomes are the most desir-

*Take time now to examine your company's financial health.*

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able and attainable.

For example, management may want to improve cash flow by more aggressively collecting receivables – a common strategy in any economy. What would be the impact on cash flow, financing costs and profitability if total receivables were reduced by 10 days? How about 20 days? What if the effort misses its goal and only succeeds in a five-day reduction?

Each scenario paints a different picture of profitability, and creates arguments for or against that action as one element in a larger strategic plan.

Close analysis may uncover areas for improvement within over-billings and under-billings, two common occurrences in construction that impact cash flow. Both can be improved once they are examined in conjunction with other factors in the financial analysis. Contractors may also be able to pinpoint the causes of problems with projects where estimated profit margins are higher than final profit margins. A number of factors may be contributing to this “profit fade,” many of which can be improved with better controls.

### Set Goals and Develop a Plan

Another planning technique is to set goals and analyze all of the objectives that must be met in order to achieve those goals. Key components of assets, liabilities, revenues and expenses can be compared to benchmarks or budgets to identify opportunities for improvement.

For example, major current asset and liability accounts can be altered to observe their effects on profitability. Once the desired results are achieved in the model, management can determine the most effective way to implement the changes to obtain improvements in the company’s performance.

The economic outlook is improving, and most agree that glimmers of renewed growth are on the horizon. Implementing a financial analysis program allows managers to more fully understand today’s bottom line and the drivers that will shape profitability as the economy continues to improve.

Learn how solid financial analysis can help you turn financial data into strategic plans. Contact your local Clifton Gunderson office, call 1-888-CPA-FIRM or visit online at [www.cliftoncpa.com](http://www.cliftoncpa.com). ■

*Scott B. Tracy, CPA, is an assurance partner and firmwide leader of Clifton Gunderson’s construction and real estate practice. He has more than 20 years of experience providing accounting, audit and tax services specializing in the construction and real estate industry. For more information, Scott can be reached at Clifton Gunderson in Milwaukee, Wisconsin at (414) 476-1880 or by e-mail at [Scott.Tracy@cliftoncpa.com](mailto:Scott.Tracy@cliftoncpa.com). Clifton Gunderson has been a member of the AGC of Wisconsin since 2004.*

### MARK YOUR CALENDAR

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**February 8, 2010**  
**Safety & Education Day**  
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# AGC of Wisconsin leads the industry in professional development and safety education:

## Professional Development



**PMDP**, AGC's new Project Manager Development Program, provides the fundamentals of project management to construction professionals.

**BIM Education Program** provides contractors with the essential information and skills needed to successfully implement BIM.

## Safety Education

**OSHA 10 & 30 Hour Training** provides an awareness of safety and health concerns in the construction industry.



**NCCCO Crane Training** addresses specific topics about crane operations and safety that are critical for successful completion of practical exam.

## Supervisory Training



**STP**, the Supervisory Training Program developed by AGC is designed to meet the needs of the construction industry. Developed, updated, and field-tested by and for contractors, the program consists of ten courses that focus on the knowledge and skills that every supervisor must have to be an effective manager of people, time and materials.



**AGC of Wisconsin**

**S K I L L    R E S P O N S I B I L I T Y    I N T E G R I T Y**

To learn more about educational opportunities in Wisconsin, visit [www.agcwi.org](http://www.agcwi.org) and click on the Events Calendar.