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SPRING 2009

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THE MAGAZINE FOR CONSTRUCTION EXECUTIVES

Pillar Construction, Inc.

Just Call Them the Skin Doctors

Produced by Suzanne Mason & Written by Shelley Seyler

One of the most obvious, if not most important, aspects of any building is the exterior. Referred to as the skin, the envelope, or the shell, among other names, it is not only the first thing in a person's sightline but also is a niche market in the industry all on its own.

Founded in 1995, Pillar Construction Inc. works in this niche, headquartered in Alexandria, Virginia, just outside Washington, DC. Serving the nation's capital, Maryland, Virginia, and Pennsylvania from their headquarters,

the company's satellite offices expand their reach to impressive corners of the country: Salem, New Hampshire for their New England market, Orlando for their South East market, and Houston Texas for their South West market. Having international experience already under their belt, Pillar is planning to expand this already impressive footprint overseas.

With annual revenue of over \$20 million, the company's payroll includes hundreds of employees. A team of multi-cultural architects,

engineers and construction professionals with over 20 years of experience in the construction field, estimating, and accounting is leading the way. As a specialty contractor that works on the skin of buildings, Pillar specializes in exterior sheathing, Waterproofing, and Exterior Coatings. In house the company holds drywall, stucco, water proofing, moisture and air barriers, caulking, and cement plaster. "We are a one-stop-shop for real estate owners and managers, general contractors and construction





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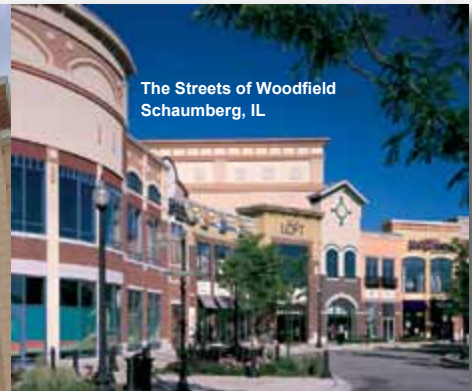
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managers,” says Gabriel Castillo, Senior Estimator.

Managing suppliers is also an important aspect of Pillar’s success. The company has a group of certified applicators and uses the best products from established manufacturers to comply with the architect’s design and specifications. Representing the quality of their work, Pillar is a Certified Installer of industry-leading products.

Pillar’s cohesive team of project managers, estimators and field personnel know what makes projects run smoothly and is steering the company through today’s hard economic phase with grace, persistence and ingenuity.

Focusing most of their energy on high-rise residential, commercial, hospitality, and institutional projects, Pillar is prolific in its services, which is proven by the company’s list of completed projects.

Keeping it Interesting

The most interesting challenges are restoration projects. “Imagine taking off the exterior of your house while you’re still living it. [These projects] can take from two months up to a year because we have to phase the process around occupying tenants. This takes a lot of coordination to minimize disruption of the construction process as well as everyday life of families or organizations using the buildings,” explains Bill Perry, Senior project manager. Five years ago, Pillar completed the total skin replacement of a high rise building in crystal City VA. The company is currently working on a new construction project in Austin, Texas which, when completed, will be one of the highest residential towers in the city, reaching as high as 40 stories. One of the complexities of executing the stucco application on such a tall building is the need to look for more efficient ways of getting materials up to these higher elevations.

Much of Pillar’s work on any project provides points towards a building’s LEED certification. The green building movement has picked up momentum in recent years and Pillar applications are great contributors to LEED points. “We are green,” says President Raja Khoury, simply.

Staying on Top

To keep the company familiar with current trends, Pillar utilizes an industry certification process that involves hands-on training to keep employees updated on the latest techniques, management tools, estimating software, and accounting. Pillar encourages everyone to further enhance their professional career by attending seminars.



Attaining the majority of their projects through competitive bid, Pillar often bids with clients they have worked with in the past, making it easier for both parties. For each client, Pillar couples one manager with the project so they have a “one point contact for pre-construction, production and finances; though this is a team effort, there is always one lead person clients can talk to,” says Perry.

When in need of construction professionals, the company looks no further than their field personnel. “Most office employees have come from the field. We value hands-on experience.” Pillar also participates in job fairs to recruit interns and students. The company makes a point to involve each employee in the success of the company so it is not just one person doing one

specific task. “This makes everyone a part of the success of any project,” Comments Castillo. Coupled with Pillar’s competitive remuneration package, this is an effective retention technique.

The Future

Pillar Construction has its sights set high. Literally. The company has plans to become more heavily involved in high-rise projects, such as the one in Austin. Pillar has the experience, the human resources and the technical support to complete this kind of project successfully.

Acknowledging that these are tight economic times, Pillar is aware that the industry on a whole is becoming more selective. “Pillar’s reputation and accomplishments prove that we are serious and committed to

high standards. Keeping projects funded and maintaining the cash flow, particularly in this market, can be concerning. Strong estimating and detailed track of costs are the key elements to weather this down turn,” says Khoury.

Infrastructure, government, and institutional projects also help companies like Pillar thrive in this market. Pillar’s experience on this type of project is an excellent credential allowing the company to land this additional work.

The company is well-positioned around the country and will continue serving its specialty market, with their eyes set for higher elevations.