

Construction Subcontracting and COVID-19 Recovery in the Southwest

By Mike Ragogna

The COVID-19 pandemic was responsible for obstacles affecting virtually every industry, including construction. One of the associated fields hardest hit was subcontracting since it relies so heavily on manpower that was on lockdown, as well as suppliers that had diminished inventories. But with constant work involving structures like the Optimum Building in Albuquerque—with its multiuser high-end space that includes units for oncology, a wellness center and executive suites—and The Lowell West Complex C facility—a new ground-up addition to Albuquerque Public Schools—a full industry comeback seems imminent.

After consulting with several member companies, American Subcontractors Association (ASA) of New Mexico Executive Director Gia Espinoza explains, “When COVID-19 first came about, our members were

on top of it. There was the occasional shutdown due to exposure, but once the problem was cleared, they were back on track with their projects.” New Mexico’s OSHA was involved, attending to any reported cases. “Once we all figured out how to be safe with proper PPE, social distancing, sanitation and protocols for exposure, our members were confident with proceeding as usual.”

Though it obviously would affect output, workforce protection from COVID-19 became the obvious priority from the very beginning. “There were any number of new procedures and approaches that were put in place over the past year and a half to address potential COVID-19 exposure,” says Sean Calvert, a member of the ASA Attorneys Council. “One of the most significant procedural changes was purely internal for companies and driven by the employment requirements of the Families First Coronavirus Response Act and resultant uncertainty in manpower planning.”

“Aside from the direct COVID-19-related delays as a result of positive test results,” Calvert continues, “several projects have experienced temporary or permanent cessation of work due to financing concerns or general uncertainty by the owner. Another noticeable effect was supply delays or unavailability of materials or equipment in what would be the normally anticipated time frame for scheduling.” Prime Electric’s Co-Owner and Vice President of Estimating and Project Management Ray Moya adds, “Because of COVID-19, our approach to jobsite and workplace safety took on a different look. Social distancing, mask wearing, hand washing and sanitizer stations became the new normal for our employees.”

However, the industry persisted as best it could—and increasingly rallied. “One area that experienced a significant

uptick in work early was commercial tenant improvements, with many owners opting to use the opportunity of suddenly empty facilities to perform renovations,” Calvert recalls. “Many municipalities and government entities also used the opportunity of suddenly empty facilities to perform needed infrastructure repairs and improvements.”

“Our commercial work is the majority of our sales, and this sector was hit the hardest due to jobs closing down and or being pushed off until this year,” says FCA International Glazing Contractor Dan Hope. “Our residential work was slow at first and then took off. It continues to keep us very busy, and we mostly deal with general contractors. But now we have an influx of homeowners calling. They have been sitting at home with not much to do, and they see projects or remodels that they have neglected. So residential remodel work flourished though commercial work was very negatively impacted.”

Despite the past year’s reduction in construction and added nips and tucks that adjusted to a pandemic atmosphere, subcontracting seems poised to have a very healthy and profitable year. “2021 stands to be a very good year with the commercial work that was pushed off from last year,” Hope confirms.

“Generally, specialty contracting companies survived the past year and a half, and they are now looking at expanded work opportunities and an increasing backlog of work, particularly in the residential and multifamily sectors,” Calvert says.

And according to its COO Richard Bright, the ASA—which currently represents more than 1,800 subcontractors and suppliers in the construction industry—had 1,399 members contact 39 governors about keeping construction work essential at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. ♦



Part of Albuquerque Public Schools, the Lowell West Complex is a new 45,362-sq-ft, 2-story facility consisting of a combination of structural steel framing and structural masonry construction plus an approximately 3-acre site-development package.

Spiral-Welded Steel Pipe Plant Opens in Texas

For well over a century, AMERICAN Cast Iron Pipe Co. has provided vital products to society while maintaining its foundational commitment to building strong communities. This vision includes the recent construction of a new spiral-welded steel pipe plant located in Paris, Texas. This strategic investment is intended to expand company operations and increase economic development within the southwestern U.S.

The state-of-the-art facility uses the latest manufacturing technology to fabricate steel pipe in diameters up to 144 in. It is operated by AMERICAN SpiralWeld Pipe, an AMERICAN subsidiary with existing steel pipe operations in both South Carolina and Michigan. Applications for spiral-welded steel pipe manufactured at this new facility include transmission, distribution and collection lines for water and

wastewater; penstocks; water intakes and outfalls; and structural pilings.

The AMERICAN family of companies employs approximately 2,600 people, including about 60 team members in Paris, Texas. Its diverse

product line includes ductile iron pipe, valves and hydrants for the water sector, and high-frequency welded steel pipe for the energy sector. To learn more about the company and its products, please visit www.american-usa.com. ♦



Pipe is loaded for transport to a jobsite.

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