

TRIBUILD CONTRACTING (CALGARY) LTD.

Serving Alberta's commercial, industrial, retail and civic arenas since 1982

BY DEBRA R. MESSICK

TRIBUILD CONTRACTING (CALGARY) Ltd.'s diverse client list is a veritable who's who of the region, including luminaries like PetroCanada, Shaw and Telus Communications, and the Calgary Board of Education. The company's customers include a vast cross section of the area's corporate, government, and utility agencies as well as the commercial, retail, and professional sectors.

Fred Baxter, Tribuild's president and one of its founders, says that most of 25–30 projects the company is currently handling resulted from referrals or returning clients. They range in price from \$50 thousand to \$10 million. "Our largest output in dollar volume is in new school construction," he says, "while the largest percentage of projects (about 70 percent) comes from office interior and renovation jobs." He names computer data centre projects as Tribuild's third largest area of focus.

Tribuild's impressive array of projects includes the Chaparral, Panorama Hills, and Taradale schools, Mount Royal College offices, PetroCanada's new offices and data centre upgrades for Shaw Communications. Area dental offices, convenience stores, and banks have also benefited from Tribuild's expertise in meeting the specific needs of clients both large and small, from start to finish.

Most of Tribuild's work is located in Calgary, but the company has accommodated the needs of regular clients with projects across Alberta, sometimes setting up remote offices to facilitate construction.



Left to right: John Leskow, vice president; Tony Newman, sales manager; Fred Baxter, president.

The company's achievements are all the more remarkable considering that it was born in 1982, which Baxter remembers as "the year of the big oil crash"—conditions that mirror today's economic situation.

Baxter and his partners, John Leskow and Hans Kreuz, were working in the construction industry in those days. Baxter had trained in architectural construction and gone on to work in the estimating field, while Leskow was a journeyman carpenter. Starting a business together seemed more appealing than living with the constant threat of being laid off.

Tribuild's first years were tough. "The first two or three months we took each job as it came up and did all the construction work ourselves," Baxter recalls.

"At first, we did strictly office interiors. We got work from a couple of oil companies doing partitioning renovations.

"It took us four or five years to realize that we were a growing entity in the marketplace, and that we were going to be successful," he adds. "Every year we continued to grow."

The late 1980s marked a significant turning point in Tribuild's development. "About that time, we were quite busy with a much bigger volume of projects. That's when we started hiring others to do the hands-on work, and we took care of the management part of the business," Baxter notes. By 2008, the company's roster had surged to 35 full-time employees representing at least 50 different subtrades.

AT A GLANCE

LOCATION:
CALGARY, AB

AREAS OF SPECIALTY:
COMMERCIAL, RETAIL,
INDUSTRIAL, AND
CIVIC CONTRACTING
MANAGEMENT

CURRENT PROJECTS:
28+

EMPLOYEES:
35

As president, Baxter manages client development along with finance and operations. Vice president Leskow serves as job superintendent and personnel manager responsible for all aspects of on-site construction and management, including safety requirements and enforcement. (The third founder, Kreuz, retired in 2005.)

Sales manager Tony Newman serves as the company's safety officer, working to exceed Alberta's mandated occupational health and safety requirements. Tribuild's policies of promoting safe employee behavior and providing ongoing first-aid training has earned it a certificate of recognition from the Alberta Construction Association.

Tribuild's employee mentoring program assists those interested in pursuing construction industry apprenticeships. By so doing, the company also helps the contracting industry by expanding the pool of skilled labor it depends upon.

"Any new hires that show potential interest we encourage to continue their training by going into an apprenticeship," Baxter says. Although that path means certain sacrifices—namely, being a student instead of a paid worker for two months out of the year—earning journeyman status can pay off in the long run with a potential doubling in salary.

The Tribuild team includes many loyal employees who have been with the company for 15 to 20 years. Baxter recognizes that their service has been an important component to the company's overall success. Similarly, Tribuild has developed long-term relationships with many of its clients. "We've worked for a number of the same clients for 10 to 15 years, and they feel more confident seeing the same faces each time," Baxter observes. "We often receive specific client requests for the same supervisor and management personnel responsible for their last project."

Continuity builds client confidence, and it also helps operations run smoothly. Baxter likes to become involved with all clients as early as possible in the contracting process. "The earlier you can get everyone involved, the smoother things usually go in the long run," he says, noting the crucial importance of accurate budgeting, material location, and acquisition are during any project's formative stages.

Because its focus is commercial, Tribuild has stayed busy even as the economy has slowed residential contractors' growth. And in any case, having thrived through the economic downturn of 1982, Baxter remains sanguine about what the future holds.

"No matter what the economic climate is, there's always opportunity," he says. "Things are always moving one way or another, whether a company needs renovations to meet their own changing needs or to sublease space." CBQ

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