

Construction

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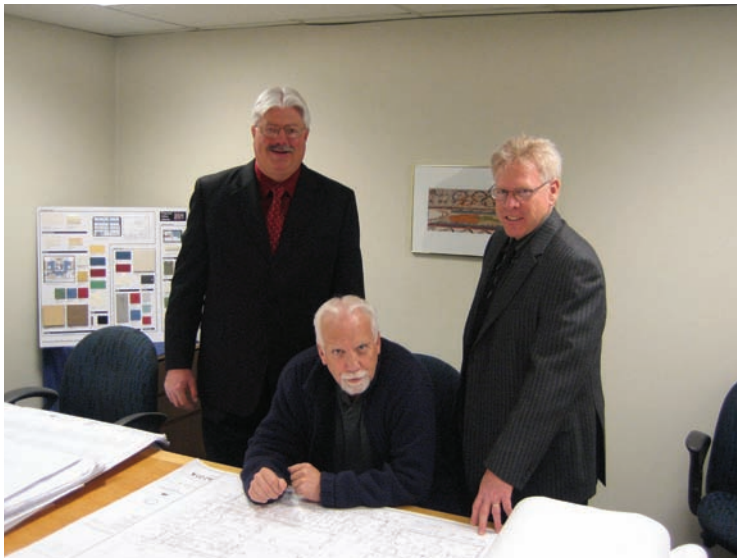
TRIBUILD CONTRACTING (CALGARY) LTD. THREE IS THE MAGIC NUMBER

THE MAGAZINE FOR LEADING INDUSTRY EXECUTIVES

Three is the Magic Number

Produced by TaMeka Marshall & Written by Robin Lasher

The key to a successful construction job is threefold - careful planning, skilled execution, and synergy between all the trades on a job. A construction business succeeds in much the same way. Create the right combination of management, labor and client relations and you've got a winning team. Just ask the guys in charge of TriBuild Contracting (Calgary) Ltd. of Calgary. The company formed as a way to harness the varied skills of its three founders: Fred Baxter, John Leskow and Hans Kreuz.



"We had a lot of experience working together," remembers Baxter, one of the founders. "But we basically each had our own areas of work, and we gave each other a lot of autonomy." With Baxter as estimator and general manager, Kreuz as project manager and Leskow as lead carpenter and site supervisor, TriBuild launched in 1982, specializing in commercial interiors. Everything clicked, and TriBuild's business steadily grew the company in to one of the region's most established general contracting firms.

Twenty-seven years later, Tribuild is doing better than ever, with annual revenues doubling in the past five years to

\$30 million. While Kreuz retired several years ago, Baxter and Leskow remain steadily on board. Baxter is company CFO and estimator, and Leskow is Personnel Manager and Supervisor for On-Site Operations. TriBuild does full-service construction management, completing projects for data centers, schools, oil companies and beyond.

The Projects

"We like to get involved in projects that are challenging, a little different," says Baxter. One current high-profile project is the new 700,000 square foot, 40-floor office center for Suncor Energy Inc. after its merger with PetroCanada. Another recent client is Weatherford Canada, as oil companies have been important clients since the firm's beginnings with Shell and Mobil Oil.

Data centers are an important niche for TriBuild. A big break was working on the \$20 million data center for TELUS in 2000. "It was a high-pressure job with strict timelines and due dates," says Baxter. TriBuild updated an old building and built new computer facilities within that building. There were about 150 men on the job, and TriBuild proved adept at coordinating the electrical, mechanical and architectural sides of the project. Since then, the company has done jobs for Shaw, CB Richard Ellis, and other communications and technology firms.

"The major challenge in renovating data centers is that it's in operation 24-7, so everything is always live and when you're updating power, air conditioning, or expanding; there's always the opportunity for things to go wrong and shut down," explains Baxter. TriBuild prides itself on seamless planning among consultants and contractors to insure there are zero outages and operations remain unimpeded.

The Partners

Great planning and communication is the result of strong relationships with all the subtrades on a job. TriBuild has a trusted roster of trade partners to recommend to clients.



“We’ve worked with most of them over the years, especially the larger ones capable of doing these kinds of projects,” affirms Baxter. TriBuild maintains a company philosophy of customer satisfaction, commitment to excellence and long-term relationships, and the company seeks out subcontractors that operate with similar spirit.

Strong relationships also help TriBuild win new project commissions. Much of the company’s work is either repeat business or referrals. “We don’t have a huge client base, but it is a well-established client base,” reveals Baxter. The Calgary school board has been an important repeat client, hiring TriBuild to construct three new schools. These projects include 30 to 40 different subtrades, and require TriBuild to display what it does best: efficient project administration.

The education sector has kept TriBuild busy even as the economy dipped in the past year. Baxter explains, “With the three new schools, we did a substantial number of renovations at the same time and are still doing a lot for the

school board, so when the economy went down we had a lot of work to finish. We’ve stayed steady, even hired people in the last month of so.”

The Progress

Staying busy is a relief for a company that puts so much pride in its workforce. Many of TriBuild’s senior supervisors have been with the company for 15 to 20 years. The core staff is 50 strong, made up of about 15 supervisors and a team of skilled laborers, apprentices and journeyman carpenters. Mentoring the younger workforce is important to TriBuild. “We do encourage all our new workers interested in fields to get into the apprenticeship program,” notes Baxter. “We encourage staff to take classes, such as in project management, so they have diversified education.” While trying to build qualified manpower can be a challenge, TriBuild uses Internet advertising and employment agencies to help get the word out and find good people to add to its team.

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TriBuild is no stranger to the green building movement sweeping the industry. Even when a project is not LEED certified, TriBuild recycles, reuses and salvages materials like metal and tile rather than dump them. "We find more and more that even if the project isn't LEED everyone is trying to be more environmentally friendly as standard

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practice,” explains Baxter. Pleasing a client while staying environmentally friendly is all the better.

Customer satisfaction is the ultimate goal for TriBuild. “I think one of our big advantages right now is our management and employees have very good working relationships with customers,” says Baxter. Combined with deft organization and management, and a rich knowledge of building process and industry standards, TriBuild Contracting continues to progress on the same principles as when the company started: “We basically had a lot of trust and let the other partners do their job. We never doubted each other along the way.” ■

COMPANY AT A GLANCE

Established : 1982
TriBuild Employees : 40
President : Fred Baxter


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