

The Sept. 11 Staten Island Memorial, dedicated to the firemen and policemen who provided rescue efforts, was a key project for Western Construction.



COMMUNITY FOCUS

Looking toward growth, Western Construction Group does not want to lose sight of its longtime values and priorities. —HANNA ARONOVICH

THE NOTION OF FAMILY RUNS STRONGLY through Western Construction Group's culture. Based in St. Louis, Western Construction is a specialty construction company focused on building restoration and preservation services. Founded in 1915, the company remains family owned and operated by the third generation.

CEO Ben Bishop says the company's longevity sets it apart from competitors. "We have been in the industry for more than 90 years and have branches in 34 metropolitan areas across the United States," he says. "We are very market driven to our loyal customers. Although we are a national company, we participate in the local markets like a small company."

He says Western Construction emphasizes its entrepreneurial spirit and places significant trust and faith in its local managers. "Each manager in each region does slightly different work," Bishop notes. "One of our successes has been the ability to give our local people the entrepreneurial skills to do what the market dictates."

Western Construction is diversified. Bishop says about 55 percent of the company's work is in concrete restoration and waterproofing. Project types range from parking garages and stadiums to plaza decks. The remainder of Western Construction's work is in exterior masonry restoration.

Each Western Construction office remains connected through frequent communication. "Through cell phones and laptops, for example, we spend an exorbitant amount of time in contact with each other," Bishop says. "We have an extensive IT department, which allows us to gather information, enter it into a database and get it to the field quickly."

Run by the third generation, and with fourth-generation employees currently involved with the company, Western Construction holds its values high. With local autonomy, honesty and integrity are essential for local

PROFILE

Western Construction Group
www.westerngroup.com
2004 sales: \$131 million
Headquarters: St. Louis
Employees: 1,325
Service: Construction
Ben Bishop, CEO: "Being a family business ... we really think long-term in our decision-making."

▷ managers and all employees, Bishop says.

Founding partner George N. Bishop Sr. stressed the importance of upholding core values and a strong work ethic, and the company says this philosophy is carried through in all interactions, communications and day-to-day decisions. Because the foundation of the philosophy is hard work, all members of the current leadership team first gained experience in the field. Ben Bishop worked as a laborer, branch and sales manager, and regional director before taking on his current position.

"Understanding what it's like to be part of this organization from every perspective is extremely valuable," he says. "You make decisions differently when you know what it's like at a personal level."

Because so many employees work their way up through the company, training at every level is essential. Bishop says about 66 percent of its employees are union, while the rest are not. Western Construction participates in local union training and the Associated General Contractors' programs, as well as apprenticeships.

"We also do a lot of divisional training," he explains. Along with internal safety training, Western Construction started a management program, which it calls Western University. Basing its courses on university classes, Western Construction holds training sessions three to four times a year.

"We bring in key people and work with a consulting company to organize the program," Bishop says. "We're establishing it as a university-style course with training sessions in selling, administration, marketing, communications and technology."

Because of its employees' skill level, Western Construction is able to perform work on challenging projects. Bishop says the company completed restoration work on the reflecting pool at the World War II Memorial, located at the National Mall in Washington, D.C. "It was a big reflecting pool that had all kinds of concrete and leaking problems," he explains. "We were called in by the parks and recreation office to use our expertise to keep the water from draining out and the fountain working."

Western Construction also erected a Sept. 11 Staten Island, N.Y., memorial, dedicated to the firemen and policemen who provided rescue efforts.

Western Construction has won numerous awards, including the New York Landmarks Conservancy Lucy G. Moses Preservation Award for its work on the Brooklyn Historical Society Building in 2004; the Greater Houston Preservation Alliance – Good Brick Award for Trinity Episcopal Church in 2003; the Gilbane Subcontractor Award in 2003; and the AGC Subcontractor Excellence in Construction Award in 2003.

Western Construction plans to continue growing internally at about 5 to 7 percent each year. Acquisitions are not part of the growth plan, Bishop explains, because the culture at Western Construction is highly valued. Remaining loyal to its employees and the future health of the company is a continued priority.

"Being a family business for as long as we have, we really think long-term in our decision-making," Bishop says. "In this industry, volatility is high. We hang in there for each other – whether it's an employee with a family emergency or a branch that has a bad break. This is a long-haul deal for us." ■



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