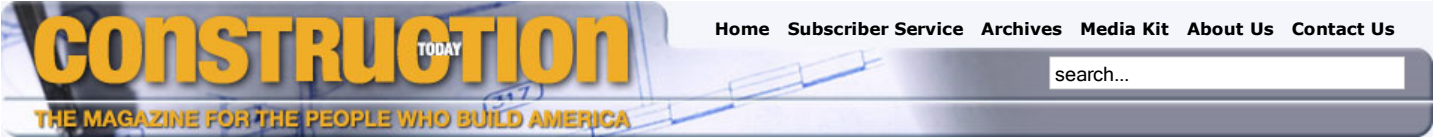




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Andres Construction Services

By Brooke Infusino
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For Dallas-based general contractor **Andres Construction Services**, its ability to find efficiencies in the construction process is part of what makes the contractor suited to work on high-density, complex mixed-use developments in Texas. President Wade Andres says the firm has built long-term relationships by keeping clients' best interests close at hand when developing, estimating and delivering the project, no matter what the budget is.

Andres and his father – Chairman and CEO Gil Andres – founded the firm in 1991, along with long-time associate and CFO Dinah Hays. Wade's brother, Senior Vice President Warren Andres, also helps manage operations.

Construction Today recently spoke with Andres about the firm's evolution, its management strategy during the recession, the best way to maintain quality on the job site and how its helping its clients spend construction dollars wisely.

Construction Today: Have you had to add to or change any of your services to compete in the market?

WA: We are continuously working to improve our ability to deliver our projects better, faster and more economically. We have employed the latest technology to assist in more accurate estimating and quantity take off using system and material cost databases. Normally, we work with our clients and their design consultants from concept to completion. During the early concept we are able to provide structural, component and systems analysis to ensure that current market conditions are factored into those decisions early in the design process.

CT: What is the state of the construction market in Texas?

WA: Texas has been significantly impacted by the economy. However, not to the degree as other parts of the country. Most of our work is oriented around high-density residential and mixed-use product. This would include high-rise residential, student housing, senior living, historical adaptive reuse, (as well as) historical renovation.

CT: Have you had to diversify with the economic slowdown?

WA: In addition to our corporate campus, private school and church work, we have carved out a unique market as a commercial contractor adapting to high-density, wood-frame construction, adaptive reuse projects and continuing-care retirement communities.

CT: How has the economy impacted business and the type of clients you serve?

WA: Conventional financing is nonexistent and we see more work turning to bond financing and federal programs with the Department of Housing and Urban Development. We have done several high-end urban residential projects, which are historic renovations and adaptive reuse. HUD has expanded their interest in providing financing for urban renewal.

CT: Once awarded a contract, how do you organize the work force and prepare to build the project?

WA: With most of our projects beginning in the early concept phases, and mainly with repeat clients, we are able to integrate management personnel into the pre-construction phases of the work and build from existing staff for the on-site construction positions. This allows for a project staff to be fully aware of the specific goals we want to achieve for each project and client.

CT: What are some of the quality control and safety efforts Andres employs on the job site?

WA: Quality starts in the planning process, but includes several key ingredients. One we call "red lining" the construction documents. This



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includes a final coordination of all trades and disciplines.

Our project team – including subcontractors – thoroughly reviews the drawings and provides mark-ups and additional information to be incorporated into the final set of construction documents. We then sit down with the design team to review, so the consultants understand the remaining information that is needed. This greatly improves our ability to focus on quality and production in the field.

We have a multi-family coordinating superintendent that helps provide lessons learned both in the planning and execution of our residential products. This allows information to flow between planning and construction in real time, helping to avoid potential mistakes, code changes or issues that may have come up in the past that we can improve on in the future.

We have developed an exterior wall superintendent position with training in all aspects of the components of exterior wall assemblies and details, who then inspects these components during installation. This has greatly improved our ability to deliver a watertight exterior envelope.

We have a Fair Housing and ADA position on staff that reviews design drawings through final construction drawings and performs on-site construction inspections ensuring that our product complies with these codes before construction is complete and becomes problems. Over the last few years we have been focused on green building practices. More than 60 percent of our staff is either LEED- or Green Advantage-certified.

CT: Is the firm incorporating any proprietary construction methods or new technologies?

WA: In our residential product, we assemble what we refer to as the "Unit Bible." This is a package-by-unit type of an enhanced unit plan – with mechanical, electrical and plumbing, including critical dimensions, rough openings, cabinet shop drawings, appliance spec data and any special finish materials. Our superintendents then have easy access to all information when performing inspections beginning with rough-in through finishes. Some superintendents use this in a three-binder format, others through a laptop computer with a wireless Internet card.

We use special estimating software to do drawing overlays for all aspects of construction coordination. We can overlay the above-ceiling MEP rough-in with the floor truss shop drawings to avoid potential conflicts in the field as an example.

CT: Describe your corporate culture and anything unique about the employees you've hired.

WA: Our corporate culture is that we don't have a corporate mentality, but more of a family friendly environment where we are, at every position, working for the common goal of delivering the highest-quality product in a well-managed fashion. The office staff supports the field staff in the execution of our work. We recruit and hire from major college construction programs, and most of our new hires have worked summer internships or have relationships with others within our company. Our growth has been based on improving every aspect of our project delivery process.

CT: How would you describe the relationship with the subcontractor community?

WA: We are very familiar with the subcontractor base in the markets in which we work. All subcontractors are prequalified prior to issuance of a subcontract and on a monthly basis through an outside consulting firm. We view our relationship with our subcontractors as partnerships where we expect their most competitive price, quality execution and participation to achieve a successful project.

CT: Do you see sustainable construction weathering the economic storm better than other segments?

WA: We view sustainable building practices as responsibility and an opportunity to provide our clients with a competitive advantage. It's more of a reality than a marketing concept.

CT: What has been your best business decision?

WA: Our best business decisions come every day and are made by all of our people wanting to be the best in our industry, always looking for ways to improve the construction process.

CT: Do you have any recruitment or retention strategies?

WA: We participate in construction events at the colleges where we have had success in hiring well prepared graduates. We like to hire interns that are recommended by recent graduates, or that we have interviewed at events. In recent years we have used an early signing bonus to make sure we get the commitments we want. Our future growth is based on the development of individuals within the company rather hiring on a project to project basis.

Quality Commitment

Andres says its commitment to quality starts at the first meeting with the owner and architect during the pre-construction phase. "This team-based approach builds confidence between all parties; everyone feels assured the final product will measure up to expectations," it says.

Subcontractors play an important part in this approach. Andres has long-standing relationships with the subcontractors based on a tradition of good management, timely payment and fair treatment, it says.

Andres helps the owner and architect reduce the initial costs while maintaining the quality through value-engineering. The construction pros at Andres review every detail of the project, from site work and constructability, to materials and finishing touches and suggest alternatives that deliver more value. By attacking problems early, Andres eliminates the source of most delays, cost overruns and quality issues.

Andres project managers work along side an officer of the company on each project. This system brings formidable levels of experience to bear on each project. The client's satisfaction remains, at all times, the number one priority. On nearly 90 percent of its jobs, it serves as construction manager, focusing on constructability, quality and value.

The company's projects have not gone without recognition. In 2007, the National Association of Homebuilders (NAHB) recognized Andres work on Gables Republic Tower in downtown Dallas as the nation's Best Adaptive Ruse project for 2007. NAHB also recognized a second project – the Canal Side Lofts in Las Vegas – as the Best New Loft Apartment Community in 2007.

Vendor Focus

In today's market, becoming the choice supplier for high-profile construction projects takes innovative thinking and responsible business practices. No one knows this better than Master WoodCraft Cabinetry LLC.

With a management staff that has more than 250 years of experience in producing, shipping and installing cabinetry and countertops in the multifamily sector, this Marshall, Texas-based firm remains a cost-competitive producer.

Master WoodCraft provides total turnkey projects for the contracting community in 14 states in the Mid-South, Southwest and Southeast, including the manufacture, delivery and installation of its cabinets and countertops. A state-of-the-art, 250,000-square-foot manufacturing facility allows the company to offer its clients quality products at competitive prices.

"We decided that we wanted only the best technology there was in the industry," CEO and founder Gene Ponder recalls. "Very few cabinetry companies have put new technologies into effect."

High-tech woodworking systems include a Cefla fully automated finishing line and a Superfici fully automated computerized finishing line. Both utilize water-based finishing materials and reduce the need for manpower by at least 40 people. The computerized rough mill produces components for framed/frameless cabinets with numerous door styles, using poplar, maple and German beech. Master WoodCraft also runs two Homag BOF 511 CNC twin table routers, which optimize a European method of manufacturing known as nested-based manufacturing.

From its inception, Master WoodCraft has aimed to be an environmental steward. The manufacturer received the Environmental Stewardship Program certificate from the Kitchen Cabinet Manufacturers Association. "We are trying to use the greenest methods that we can," Ponder says. Master WoodCraft recycles all wood scrap and paper products, and uses environmentally friendly water-based finishing materials. In addition, because individual manufacturing processes are housed in separate buildings on a 90-acre campus, certain areas only need to be operational when orders for that product have been selected; which saves natural resources and reduces energy costs. For more information, visit mwccabinetry.com.

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