

FINANCE AND COMMERCE

Business News

October 24, 2009

Design-build: Building things that work well

by Tom Hannasch, PE, LEED AP Design Build Institute of America – Upper Midwest Region

There's a cartoon I keep posted in my office. The scene is an office meeting at which a person standing has written on the board "We Build Things That Work," and he advises the group seated at the table, "All we're doing here is taking the pressure off Engineering and putting it on Sales." It struck me as funny and insightful.

As with all providers of goods and services, we are all in the marketplace every day and have good reason to continue to improve our skills, our processes, and ultimately, our value to our customers. And as consumers, we all like lower prices and we all want "things that work" and work well. Last month, Finance and Commerce published an article with an introduction to design-build. It is hardly a new concept, as Rob Flickinger pointed out in that article, but it certainly is a project delivery method that warrants serious consideration when we look for value, for things that work, for things that work well.

With design and construction projects, we know things work well when we have collaboration of professionals. Design-build makes that collaboration possible from the onset by streamlining the contractual relationships between the owner, designer and builder. With the design-build contract, the designer and builder must collaborate to deliver on the expectations of the owner to deliver a project that works. This collaboration minimizes the risks that come with information sharing which is especially important with the continued development of Building Information Modeling (BIM) technology.

BIM is a fabulous tool that puts what was once two-dimensional into three dimensions and, with a little extra effort, it can incorporate another dimension: time. BIM allows owners, architects, engineers and builders to all see the vision of the anticipated end product and to locate most, if not all, of the potential construction problem areas during design -- and before they would ultimately be found in the field. The most effective use of this tool is only possible through collaboration. As stated earlier, design-build makes that collaboration possible from the onset.

At the end of the day, the designer-builder is responsible to the owner for providing projects and systems that work. And every designer-builder that values their reputation strives to provide projects and systems that work well.

The DBIA-Upper Midwest Region invites you to attend their next breakfast program, Wednesday, Nov. 18 at 7:30 a.m. at the Midland Hills Country Club in St. Paul. The speaker will be Richard Thomas, vice president, Advocacy and External Affairs for DBIA. Thomas came to DBIA after more than 17 years' experience at Ames Construction in Minnesota, where he was the company's director of government and public affairs and very active in getting government approvals for use of design-build for public projects. To register, contact Sara Jensen at 952-928-7471 or sjensen@harringtoncompany.com or go to the DBIA Upper Midwest Region website, www.dbia-um.org.

Tom Hannasch is the 2009 secretary of Design Build Institute of America – Upper Midwest Region, and senior project manager at McGough Companies

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U.S. Trust Building Suite 100, Minneapolis, MN 55402 (612) 333-4244