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W&M Construction services include ground-up construction & major building rehab

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Since its founding in 1987 as an interiors construction firm, W&M Construction, based in Stamford, has greatly expanded its services to include everything from ground-up construction and major building rehabilitation to LEED-certified projects incorporating the most advanced green technologies.

In the construction industry, where firms have to weather the inevitable cyclical highs and lows, this growth required highly skilled planning and carefully executed strategy - all the more so because of the timing of the company's establishment.

"In 1987, the real estate industry was heading into a deep recession, and many general contractors and subcontractors were forced out of business," said Thomas Durels, W&M Construction's CEO.

"We cut our teeth during difficult economic times, and developed standardized business practices to ensure excellent customer service, recruit and train high-quality staff, and implement sound financial controls. We continue to build on these practices to further improve and expand our services."

"We also established certain guiding principles," he added. "Always build on-time and on-budget; provide quality workmanship; keep the client informed through proactive, responsive and transparent communication at all times; fulfill our promises, work cooperatively with the entire project team, including the architect; always pay our subcontractors on time; and hire and retain the best staff."

Over the last 20 years, adherence to these practices has benefited the firm as it continues to grow its services and client roster, while expanding its geographic reach.

Timothy Yahn, the firm's president, noted that while a large portion of the firm's business still revolves around mid-to-small size projects, it continues to come across opportunities for larger, more complex projects as well.

"For example, we recently completed the two-floor, 214,000 s/f green renovation of Pitney Bowes' world headquarters in Stamford that involved complex structural challenges," said Yahn. "Also, we recently finished ground-up projects for both the Nathaniel Ely Daycare Center in Norwalk, and the Southwest Community Healthcare Center in Bridgeport." In addition, W&M Construction has recently been awarded several \$10 million projects by ITT, Strategic Value Partners, and also the construction of the medical facility component of an assisted living complex by the Freshwater Group.

Projects like the Pitney Bowes' world headquarters demonstrate the firm's ability to execute the timely completion of large-scale, multi-phased work. The Pitney Bowes office remained in full operation and occupancy throughout the entire project, which required daily communication between the contractor and owner to coordinate and adjust to the client's changing operational needs.

When it came to green building solutions, W&M worked closely with Pitney Bowes to develop a program that reduced the environmental impact of the project. Various environmentally-sensitive building techniques were researched, including green construction methods and sustainable materials. Working with such an environmentally-responsible client came easily to W&M Construction, for it is also an eco-conscious company that, in fact, has recently converted its entire fleet of company cars to hybrids. In the end, W&M Construction was able to recycle 450 tons of construction debris, utilized synthetic gypsum and other sustainable materials, and reduced VOC emissions to improve indoor air quality, which leads to greater worker productivity.

Yahn points out that these projects around Fairfield County, and beyond, reflect the firm's expertise in health services, schools, hospitals, non-profit agencies and public works.

W&M Construction credits such growth, in part, to its impeccable customer service. "In essence, the construction business is a service business," said Yahn. "Technical expertise is the foundation of a good construction firm, but proper attention must be paid to all clients' needs."

One customer service axiom the firm says it lives by is, "never make promises we cannot keep," and thereby it maintains its integrity throughout every phase of a project. W&M finds that its adherence to this rule, in turn, instills a sense of trust with its clients. Regular communication to keep clients informed, and guidance through every decision-making process, transforms what is typically a stressful time for clients into a period of confidence and excitement, explains Yahn.

And it's not only the client with whom W&M Construction's executives and project managers are in constant communication. The firm also collaborates early and often with the client's consultants, architects, engineers and building management staff to ensure everyone is working toward the same goal. Moreover, if a problem does arise, even among those outside W&M Construction's domain, the firm makes it its responsibility to find solutions.

"We accommodate such service with a highly skilled staff that embraces team work over individualism," said Yahn. "The well-being of the client is our number one goal."

As the construction industry has become more sophisticated, Yahn said, it has been a top priority for W&M Construction to recruit and retain well-educated and experienced individuals, who can easily deal with evolving building codes, cutting-edge systems and technologies, and safety requirements. In fact, the firm has licensed architects and engineers on staff, as well as LEED-accredited experts. W&M Construction provides additional in-house training supplemented by company-paid courses in safety, construction contract administration, scheduling, accounting and other areas.

In addition to its customer service and a skilled staff, W&M Construction has also invested time and money into its financial controls.

"Early on, we implemented state of the art systems," said Yahn. "Understanding the importance of a highly functional back office, we developed a quality support, accounting and administrative staff to seamlessly run the back office portion of our job. While such work is often invisible to the client, it becomes clearly noticeable if it is lacking."

All these measures have enabled the firm's growth into a highly sought-after construction firm known for its sophistication and ability to produce high-quality, complex projects of any size, while incorporating green building technologies and, above all, ensuring customer satisfaction.