

AMERICAN BUILDERS QUARTERLY



COLONY CONSTRUCTION

SUCCEEDING AS A SMALL BUSINESS IN A BIG-BUSINESS INDUSTRY

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by **Gina Diorio**

Above: Bon Air Baptist Church, parking lot addition

IN A CONSTANTLY MOBILE SOCIETY, quality roads are unsung heroes, gaining little recognition but providing immeasurable benefits. For one Virginia company, however, roads are not simply an afterthought; they are the main focus.

Colony Construction, located approximately 30 miles outside of Richmond in Powhatan, Virginia, is a commercial paving company that builds roads and performs site projects throughout central Virginia.

Founded in 1989 by Earl and Carol Pryor, Colony Construction originally performed both commercial and residential paving. According to Scott Claud, the Pryor's son-in-law and current company President, as the commercial division grew, it became less cost-efficient to offer residential services, and in 2006, the company went 100 percent commercial.

Still, Claud notes that the company's residential expertise has been an invaluable component of its

commercial success. “On a driveway, you see every detail,” he states, “so you have to make sure it looks as good as it can. Our guys have got a high level of attention to detail from residential work.” And in an industry in which production can eclipse high standards, attention to detail can make all the difference. “Our quality has kept us in business,” Claud says.

Today, approximately 70 percent of Colony Construction’s business is paving operations, which include everything from shopping centers and banks to high schools and road widening projects, while 30 percent is bid projects, such as installing roadway turn lanes or performing site excavation and paving.

Whatever the project, however, Colony Construction maintains an impressive record of arriving at jobs on time 97 percent of the time, with the only exceptions being weather-related. “You hear a lot about people not showing up when they’re scheduled,” Claud relates. “When you’re working for developers or big general contractors, the scheduling factor is big. When they can count on you, that helps you retain business.”

Colony Construction has done much more than simply retain business, however. Since 2002, the company has grown by an average of 40 percent per year, from \$3.1 million in revenue in 2002 to approximately \$13 million in 2007.

Claud is quick to pass credit for the company’s growth on to his team. “The main reason it’s happened is because of all of our employees’ concerted efforts,” Claud notes. Particularly, he cites the contributions of Part Owner and Vice President of Operations Harry King, Jr., who has been with the company for over 15 years and who supervised the Fort Pickett project.

Although the outlook for central Virginia remains positive, Claud notes that if oil prices continue to rise, paving as an industry may become

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THE, APPROXIMATELY, 60 EMPLOYEES HAVE UNDERTAKEN THE FOLLOWING PROJECTS:

- Main Street Revitalization at Fort Pickett – To complete this \$1.3 million project, Colony Construction rehabilitated ditches, dug out damaged areas, corrected faulty joints, and overlaid a 3-mile stretch of road.
- Virginia Women’s Correctional Center – Colony Construction rehabilitated and expanded the loading dock, performed cosmetic work on the facility, and widened the prison road.
- Powhatan High School – The paving of the entire high school was a special project for Colony Construction, as many of the employees are PHS alumni, and many of their children currently attend.
- Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) Road Overlay – Colony Construction is currently completing a 40,000-ton overlay of area roads. The company won this project by bid, and it marked the first scheduled work for VDOT in the Richmond District.
- Route 360, Chesterfield County – For its road widening work on this main thoroughfare, Colony Construction received the Virginia Asphalt Association’s “Virginia’s Best of 2006” award for non-VDOT urban construction.

less profitable. Indeed, over the past four years the cost of oil-rich asphalt emulsion has tripled. Because Colony Construction purchases its asphalt from outside companies, the increase has been particularly noticeable.

In response, in 2006 Colony Construction began construction of its own asphalt plant. The plant will utilize the innovative Double Barrel Green System, which allows asphalt to be made at a lower temperature, thus requiring less fuel to produce. The plant will have the option to utilize the innovative Double Barrel Green System; the plant can run with or without the system, depending on approved mix designs.

Indeed, bringing asphalt production in-house is what Claud foresees will bring future company growth. In 2007, the company installed approximately 140,000 tons of asphalt. In 2008, in the first year of asphalt production, Claud's goal is to install 175,000 tons.

No doubt Colony Construction will realize its ambitions, due to strong teamwork and the company's philosophy. In an industry servicing one of the nation's greatest needs, Claud notes, "We're serious in what we do, but we try to have fun." ^{ABQ}