



PLAY BALL Hunzinger Construction Co. built Milwaukee County Stadium, and later built its replacement, Miller Park.



BUILDING MILWAUKEE Hunzinger Construction Co. president John Hunzinger and a photo of the St. Francis Hospital construction crew.

Built to last

Hunzinger builds Milwaukee

BY ANDREW WEILAND, *of SBT*

Few industries produce a more tangible, authentic product than the construction industry. Construction firms build the places where we live, work and play. The people involved in construction projects get to enjoy a unique sense of satisfaction about the buildings they create.

"You do get that sort of quiet sense of accomplishment and sense of pride when you drive by or walk into a building that you were involved with in the construction process," said John C. Hunzinger, president and third-generation owner of Brookfield-based Hunzinger Construction Co. "There aren't a lot of industries that people can experience that. Not everyone gets to be part of a creative process like that."

The world's buildings and structures are "the ultimate statement of human accomplishment," said Hunzinger, who co-owns the company with his twin brother James R. Hunzinger, executive vice president, and brother-in-law Kevin P. O'Toole, executive vice president.

Perhaps no other local construction firm has as many authentic Milwaukee accomplishments as Hunzinger Construction Co. The firm, which celebrated its 100th anniversary last year, has built most of the significant buildings in the Milwaukee area including: the U.S. Bank Center, the Bradley Center, the Hyatt Regency Milwaukee, Bayshore Town Center, the U.S. Cellular Arena, St. Francis Hospital, Mayfair Mall, the Catholic Knights building, the M&I Bank headquarters building and the Marcus Amphitheater.

The company also built Milwaukee County Stadium and the MECCA Convention Center, and years later built their replacements, Miller Park and the Midwest Airlines Center.

It would be tempting for the company to rest on those laurels. However, that superlative resume does not guarantee

future success, Hunzinger said.

"Nobody will ever hire you for what you have accomplished in the past," Hunzinger said. "I think for us and our business (that experience) may just be the ante to get in the game. That gets us invited to the evaluation process, or the beauty pageant, as we like to call it."

Building owners have become more savvy consumers, and general contractors have to demonstrate that they will consistently meet the needs of their clients, Hunzinger said.

"I think our clients have become much better at articulating what it is that they want in a construction manager," he said.

To satisfy its clients, Hunzinger said the company strives to listen carefully to what its customers say they want. That's something that many contractors fail to do, he said.

"I like to use the term be chameleon-like in order to meet those specific project requirements to meet the expectations of a particular client and address the specific needs and challenges of a particular project," he said. "Be a good listener, a very good listener. Really

understand what people require."

Treating clients, employees and subcontractors with respect is one of the company's core values, Hunzinger said. Another core value is having a willingness to learn, adapt and self-evaluate.

The firm created a "Hunzinger Construction University" to provide ongoing training for its employees. The "university" became such a big part of the company that the firm bought a neighboring building and renovated it to be used as a training center.

The company and the employees benefit from that training, Hunzinger said.

"You've got to feel like you are growing," he said. "That's one of the things we can do as an employer. You've got to push your people."

In a major effort to improve about 10 years ago, Hunzinger took the bold step of working to put together a group of leaders of construction firms from all over the country that would provide in-depth peer reviews of each other's companies. He stole the idea from other industries that had similar groups and tried to convince non-competing contractors in other parts of the country to join the peer review group.

"No general contractors were doing anything like this," Hunzinger said.

It took Hunzinger almost four years to put the peer review group together.

"I couldn't find anybody else that wanted to do this. I told (other contrac-

CORPORATE AUTHENTICITY

Hunzinger Construction Co.

- Hunzinger built many of Milwaukee's most important buildings, including Miller Park, the Midwest Airlines Center, the Bradley Center, the U.S. Bank Center, Bayshore Town Center and many more.
- In a constant effort to improve, the company's president, John Hunzinger, is part of a peer review group of construction firm presidents that evaluates and critiques each other's firm.
- Hunzinger Construction Co. is continually innovating, adopting the latest computer modeling software to improve the efficiency of building projects, and embracing sustainable "green" building practices.

tors), "What I really want to do is have a process here where it's a no-holds-barred, take the company, dump the box on the floor and start picking through everything. Everything. I take all of my clothes off, you take all of your clothes off," Hunzinger said.

"And then they would say, 'Yikes! Count me out. There is no way I am going to let you into my company and let you look at what we're doing in estimating, or how much our people are getting paid or what our processes are.' And I said, 'Well, then I can't really learn from you, and I can't help you, because I need to understand what you're really doing, not what you want me to think you are doing.'"

Eventually, Hunzinger was able to find contractors that were willing to participate in the peer review group.

"The people that would subject themselves to that kind of a process are few and far between." Hunzinger said. "You've got to really want to get better. It can be painful, it can be enlightening, it can be embarrassing, it can be stimulating. It's all of those things."

As part of the company's constant quest to improve, the firm is always looking to innovate and adapt improved processes, Hunzinger said.

"Our industry I think has been, historically, very slow to adapt to change," he said. "Some of that is just because of this resistance to change. If it ain't broke, don't fix it."

One innovation that Hunzinger has embraced is sustainable construction, which has grown in popularity in recent years as more building owners want environmentally "green" buildings that use less energy, and therefore have lower energy costs.

Hunzinger renovated its headquarters, and the building was awarded a LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) gold certification by the U.S. Green Building Council. The Hunzinger Construction University training center building recently received a LEED platinum rating, one of the first 75 buildings in the world to achieve that rating, according to Hunzinger.

Sustainable building is an important aspect for the future of the construction industry, Hunzinger said.

"It's absolutely here to stay," he said. "It's not a fad. It's not just a trend."

Hunzinger has provided LEED training for his employees, and several of them have obtained LEED accreditation.

Another key innovation of the construction industry that Hunzinger has embraced is the use of computer modeling technology to improve the efficiency

of the construction process, and therefore lower costs and construction time but improve construction quality.

"(Computer modeling) has been in other industries for quite awhile," Hunzinger said. "You have to be willing to step outside of your comfort zone. We've been aggressive there."

Today, Hunzinger is still working on

some of the region's largest and most prominent construction projects. The firm is renovating the Northwestern Mutual Life Insurance Co. headquarters in downtown Milwaukee and the Johnson Controls Inc. headquarters in Glendale. Hunzinger is also building Park Lafayette, a 280-unit condominium development in two 20-story buildings

on Milwaukee's east side.

In addition, the firm recently received a construction safety excellence award from the Associated General Contractors of America.

"I don't think there's any higher responsibility than to provide a safe working environment for our employees," Hunzinger said.



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