

BENCHMARK CONSTRUCTION LLC

First Alaskan construction company to join USGBC seeks to innovate

BY JULIE SCHAEFFER

Right: The Snowbird Condos in Girwood, AK required both structural and architectural renovations.

BENCHMARK CONSTRUCTION LLC MAY have been the first Alaskan general contractor to join the USGBC, but that doesn't mean president Carl Brady is sitting on his laurels. The company prides itself on not just being green but being innovative in its greenness.

Born and raised in Alaska, 36-year-old Brady has worked in the construction industry most of his life. Founding a company, however, wasn't a priority when he was living in his wife's native Maine. But when the couple returned to Alaska in 2007, Brady decided to follow a dream, so he founded Benchmark Construction.

Benchmark is a commercial general contractor and developer doing all types of work, from offices to warehouses, renovations to new construction. It handles multiple projects, mainly in the Anchorage area.

At the time Brady founded the company, no other Alaskan general contractors were USGBC members. But Brady looked at the industry and saw no reason not to be green. "Being a younger guy, I'm more apt to understand the green movement," he says. "Materials have started to change, and practices have changed, such as LEED. All of that is exciting and interesting—and I think we can accomplish a lot without spending a lot. So when I saw that being green benefits the environment and the customers and the company without being hard to do, I went for it."

One of Benchmark's most unique green initiatives is called eCycle, which repurposes materials that would normally be taken from construction sites to landfills.



"We wanted to create an efficient process for industry players to reuse materials, so we formalized something we were already doing," Brady says.

"We have a short list of peers [such as Alaska Demolition, Lawrence Peek Architects and 1021 Architects] that we call when we have a demo or remodel to begin," Brady says. "After a quick walk-through, we are able to

realize what materials can be salvaged and who of the group will coordinate that process."

The group then markets those materials to clients. "If a client wants, [for example], a pair of oak doors, we'll refinish the doors at the cost of our labor. The client gets the feel-good effect of helping the environment, as well as a good story for the boardroom," says



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Carl Brady, President

Brady, who has recycled three tons of products over the past 16 months under eCycle.

He hopes this model will be embraced by other companies and then grow into a large web of small groups efficiently reusing materials.

Brady says he also tried to reduce paper waste by keeping work digital. "All drawings are sent digitally from our office to subcontractors in the field. All of my superintendents have digital cameras. All daily reports are digital," he says. "I then go through and separate all paper that does not have proprietary information on it and have it generated into recycled notepads for office use. Contractors all have their little grid paper notepads with their logo on them; ours is a little more fun because it's printed on our own wasted paper. It's a little thing, but we're proud of it."

Benchmark is also building a green office trailer. "We just bought a trailer and are completely renovating it to be a healthy and fun environment, with more sun and windows," Brady says. "It's basically a marketing tool to show people right when they come on the job site that we're environmentally conscious."

Brady and his project manager are taking their LEED exams in the fall of 2009 to "show we care," and Brady is interested in getting some LEED-certified projects within the company's portfolio. It is also part of his mission

to build "time into the process to educate ourselves and our clients about the long-term benefits and cost saving of building green," because it is challenging to convince clients to build green as it is perceived as a more expensive option."

Brady hasn't faced challenges as a result of the housing market slowdown. In fact, by June of 2009, he already had \$10 million in projects scheduled for 2010. But Brady says the one challenge the company has faced is getting residents of Alaska—a traditionally conservative state—interested in

sustainable construction. "I'm not sure we're sought after for our green focus yet," he says. "But I think eventually people will start to care more about the environment when they build, and maybe they'll look us up."

It may happen sooner than Brady thinks. In the first six months of 2009, the company worked on 10 projects in 2009 for a total of \$7 million in revenues and was projecting \$10 million in revenues for 2009 calendar year. And for 2010, it has \$10 million on the books already. GBQ



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