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ADDING COMMUNITY VALUE THROUGH EXTERIOR BUILDING RESTORATION

by Katie Gutierrez

GABRIEL CASTILLO, ESTIMATOR FOR Alexandria, Virginia-based Pillar Construction, could teach a master's course in customer service. After all, he regularly leads a team to replace the outer skin of high-rise buildings—when all occupants remain inside.

“Restoration projects involve more customer service and attention to detail,” Castillo explains. “We understand that people are living there and expect quiet times in the mornings and clean [work sites] at the end of the days. Our Estimators, Project Managers

and Field Personnel all have part in providing excellent customer service.”

According to Castillo, achieving the right combination of efficacy and consideration has been a product of time. Founded in 1995 as a specialty subcontractor with no more than 12 employees, Pillar now has offices in Virginia, Texas, and Washington DC, New England and Florida, and an employee count topping 200. Additionally, the company has evolved to a full-service construction company, offering preconstruction services and

Above: Windrows at Princeton, New Jersey.



*Above: Horizons in Chesapeake Bay, MD.
Opposite: Courtyards in Washington DC.*

consulting services for skin restoration of buildings, waterproofing, light gage framing, and drywall and stucco application. Castillo attributes their continuing growth to the hard work and passion their employees exhibit each day.

“We have created a great team of architects, engineers, and construction professionals that enables us to manage several jobs concurrently in different areas,” says Castillo. “Our success is basically because we’re not just expanding. We’re achieving a controlled growth. We know where we want to be and where we’re successful, and can provide 100 percent assurance to our clients that we’re experts in what we do.”

Indeed, Pillar Construction’s hundreds of projects, divided between high-rise apartment buildings and hotels, medical buildings, offices, retail, houses of worship, schools, and more, reflect the company’s unique expertise. Castillo takes particular pride in the \$2 million restoration of Bella Vista Condos in Arlington, Virginia. The 30-story building was 20 years old and, due its aging exterior skin, leaked water through doors and windows, and contained mold that upset tenants. Additionally, neighbors frequently objected to the building’s old and unappealing paint colors.

“Based on the recommendations of several inspectors and consultants,” Castillo says, “we tore off the skin of the building, put new exterior sheeting, and waterproofed the entire structure. Pillar assisted the HOA in selecting the new color and look of the building. We took advantage of STO Studio, a service that is offered to architects and owners to visualize the color scheme of the property.” This computerized rendering helps compare color options based on

photography or computer generated 3-D models.

The process lasted an average of six months, during which 100 percent of the tenants still occupied the building. In the end, Castillo says, Pillar Construction added value to an entire neighborhood, and the building’s reviews have been exceedingly positive.

Another notable project Pillar undertook was the restoration of a Sheraton Hotel in South Padre Island, Texas. The Pillar Construction Texas team removed the exterior sheeting,

PILLAR CONSTRUCTION INC. AT A GLANCE

ANNUAL SALES: \$26 million

SALES GROWTH IN
LAST YEAR: 30 percent

EMPLOYEES: 200

EMPLOYEE GROWTH IN
LAST YEAR: 15 percent

installed waterproofing, and enhanced the hurricane resistance system—just in time for hurricane season. Additionally, the company has worked on two extensions of large hospitals in Florida. Working on medical facilities requires extra care with the disposal of trash and debris. Castillo’s team nets the scaffolding, covers work areas, and uses vacuums to minimize the impact to the environment.

“Every job is different, even if we’re doing the same thing,” says Castillo.



“Weather, access, coworkers, sub-contractors, and general contractors are all variables. In Boston for example, the temperatures are in the '40s six months of the year, whereas Texas and Florida are the exact opposite.”

not a revolving door.”

Training and supervision, Castillo adds, are crucial to Pillar's success. Most field workers average 15 years of experience, and all are OSHA-trained, certified

“ WE CAN TRAIN [NEW EMPLOYEES] ON THE THINGS WE KNOW, BUT WE CANNOT TRAIN THEM TO HAVE PASSION FOR WHAT THEY DO, OR RESPONSIBILITY, OR HONESTY. ” *Gabriel Castillo, Estimator*

Castillo admits that it takes a particular kind of person to excel at Pillar Construction.

“We can train [new employees] on the things we know, but we cannot train them to have passion for what they do, or responsibility, or honesty,” he says. “If you're smart and passionate and know what you're doing, you're at home here. Our turnover is almost zero percent; it's

applicators. All superintendents are certified Exterior Installation Finishing System Professionals (EIFSsmart).

Recently recognized as an EIFSsmart Contractor, Pillar's training system clearly works. Annual sales in 2007 topped \$26 million, an impressive 30 percent jump from the previous year. Additionally, Castillo says, the company already has considerable backlog of projects for next year. Castillo believes

PILLAR
CONSTRUCTION,
INC.



this is a major indication that the company's business strategy is working.

"Our focus right now is basically on the restoration of high-rise buildings and the high-rise commercial residential market," he says. "We have also seen the need for a one-stop shop for contractors working on the skin of buildings.

That's the niche we're pursuing, while maintaining our standards of quality." ABQ

Left: Seabury Heights.

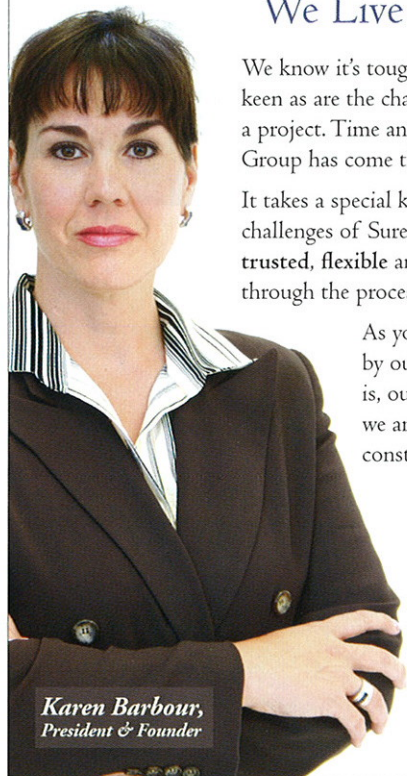
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