



McKenzie Commercial Superintendent Alan Reynolds stands with Marketing Manager Jennifer Thomas at the jobsite of one of their recent projects -- the expansion of Greenhill Humane Society in Eugene, Oregon.

McKenzie Commercial Focuses on High Value Service and Relationships

McKenzie Commercial finds success by looking at each project, not just as a one-off, but as a relationship.

BY SOPHIA BENNETT

Photos by Jack Liu

The 2007 economic recession hit the construction industry harder than most. As the phones stopped ringing and contracts stopped coming in at McKenzie Commercial in Eugene, Oregon, Principal Owner Todd Glenz and Vice President Chad Blilie sat at their conference room table and asked themselves: Were they going to follow the lead of their peers and take every job that came their way? Or were they going to continue their practice of taking only jobs they knew they could do well?

It was a frightening prospect, to turn away business when they didn't know if more was coming. But the entire company worked together in cutting expenses and focusing on the jobs that would be the best fit. In the end, they were glad they did.

The McKenzie Commercial team moves forward on the Greenhill Humane Society expansion project.



“We can spend all our time bidding and get no jobs, or we can try to find the ones that are the right fit for the company,” says Glenz. “Then we can really dive in on projects we know we can do a good job on. We look at each project not just as a one-off, but as a way for us to build a relationship with that company so we can be doing their projects for the next 20 years. We get a lot of repeat business. In fact, we’ve worked with many of the same companies for decades.”

McKenzie Commercial has retained this focus on attracting the right kind of business ever since. Their focus on customer service and treating clients like partners has paid off handsomely. “A good portion of our business comes from referrals,” says Blilie. “Those recommendations from clients mean a lot.”

They’re also just one example of the many ways the company puts people before everything else. The firm was founded in 1983 with a commitment to providing workers with good wages and benefits. “It feels good to pay living wages so people can take care of their families and have healthcare,” says Glenz, whose first job was



as an apprentice. “We’re trying to entice a younger generation, so paying good wages is important.” He remained committed to these values when he bought the business in 2007. Blilie and long-time controller Heidi Aldous, who are also part owners of the business, share that same value.

The fact that McKenzie Commercial places a high value on employees helps them recruit and retain workers, which is something many firms find challenging in today’s labor market. However, it’s not the only reason employees tend to stay with the company long-term. “We invest in people and want to work with people who invest in themselves,” says Blilie.



(clockwise) Marketing Manager Jennifer Thomas, Controller Heidi Aldous, Vice President Chad Blilie, and Principal Owner Todd Glenz discuss strategy with Jones & Roth Construction CPA & Advisor Carrie Fortier.

McKenzie Commercial provides ongoing training and helps employees who show promise obtain additional specialized training. In addition, the firm's upper management is committed to mentoring and training superintendents, foremen, carpenters, and project managers. "We can cite their strengths and weaknesses pretty quickly and work with them on areas where they need to improve," says Blilie. That one-on-one feedback, which covers both hard and soft skills, helps people to grow and advance more quickly.

There's also a certain buy-in to the company's values that helps McKenzie Commercial keep employees, says marketing manager Jennifer Thomas. "When one of our superintendents is on a job site, they're interacting with the people from that company every day. We encourage them to become part of that company and part of their story, and that's why people stay with us—because they like being part of that story."

In addition, they like the diversity of projects McKenzie Commercial takes on. As the name implies, the company does nearly all commercial work. However, they've done new construction and remodels for private companies, public sector and education clients, and nonprofits. (Those are some of the most fun, Glenz says, because they're creative and help the company give back to the community.) The variety that comes from



McKenzie Commercial is focused on mentoring its construction employees, but when Controller Heidi Aldous needed a place to turn for that same type of one-on-one feedback, she chose to look outside the company. She turned to McKenzie Commercial's Construction CPA & Advisor Carrie Fortier from Jones & Roth. Carrie has helped Heidi build her skills, but also build her network in the community. This type of external partnership has been vital to the company's success.

working on everything from banks and office buildings to medical clinics and the University of Oregon's storied Hayward Field means workers remain engaged and challenged.

Keeping employees happy, loyal, and invested in the firm's mission is vital given its business model, Blilie points out. "Our employees recognize that they're responsible not just for the work they're doing now, but also for representing our company in our long-term relationships with our clients. Because of that, they feel a commitment to providing great service."

Times are good in the construction industry right now, but Glenz knows another economic downturn is inevitable. When it comes, he and his team will be better prepared to weather the storm. "We're a big family here," Glenz says—and like a family, they will stick together no matter what challenges come their way.



Sophia Bennett is a freelance business writer based in Eugene, Oregon. Her work has appeared in Oregon Business, 1859 Oregon's Magazine, and many other publications.



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