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A Solid Reputation

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Providing Value

WILLOW HAS A SOLID REPUTATION THROUGHOUT THE EASTERN MARYLAND REGION. BY BRIAN SALGADO

Founded in 1973 by William W. Ditman as a light commercial, residential and remodeling contractor, Willow Construction has since grown into a major player in the construction market along Maryland's Eastern Shore. "We do traditional general contracting work with our own craft professionals, but we also do complete projects as a construction manager at-risk and design/builder, as well," says Vice President Andy Cheezum, noting that the company is also a licensed builder for Butler Pre-engineered Metal Buildings.

The combined experience between Cheezum, Chairman Bill Ditman and President Mike Hiner exceeds 89 years in the commercial, industrial and residential construction sectors. Willow Construction also boasts a team of knowledgeable and skilled project managers, project engineers, superintendents, carpenters and craft professionals who incorporate the latest engineering and construction technologies into its projects.

Doing Business in Maryland

Cheezum says Willow Construction boasts strong relationships with the subcontracting base in the Easton, Md., region. This has helped the company maintain fair pricing throughout the area. "This is a little bit more of a rural area, so the pool of subcontractors is not as large," Cheezum says. "That means you've got to treat them fair and pay them on time. We have longstanding relationships with them, and we've been working with some ever since we've been in business in 1973."

Willow Construction finds this ethos even more important as the struggling economy has decreased the number of available projects in the private sector. Cheezum says the company is now pursuing more public sector work while maintaining a presence in the healthcare market, which has not been as drastically affected by the economy as other markets in the private arena. Also, the company is a go-to contractor for sustainable and green construction, which it has performed for eight years since first installing geothermal systems for heating and cooling. "For now, we're focusing in on our repeat customers while reinforcing our long-



» General contractor Willow Construction is finishing Salisbury-Wicomico Senior Center (above) in Salisbury, Md. The \$6.4 million community center is on time and on budget, thanks to the company's value-engineering.



term relationships with our subcontractors," Cheezum adds. "We're certainly reminding our clients of our experience with green building."

Police Work

Willow Construction is the general contractor for the expansion and renovation of the Easton

Police Department, a \$5 million project that broke ground in September 2008. The company is responsible for 27,000 square feet of construction between renovating the existing facility and the addition.

The scope of work – which is slated for completion in January 2010 – includes upgrading

the mechanical and electrical systems, reconfiguring office space and adding new finishes to the existing facility. After undergoing a two-week delay in April and May due to weather, the project is back on schedule and still within budget.

Making an addition to a fully operational police department has required intense coordination between Willow and the owner, according to Cheezum. Fortunately, the company also built the existing structure about 17 years ago, so the company is somewhat familiar with the structure's layout.

"There were existing utilities that ran through the footprint of the building," Cheezum says. "Some were not routed on our documents, so we came up with a plan to work around them. We had to work closely on that to minimize the impact on the police department."

While coordinating rough-in planning on the project, Cheezum says the construction team was able to guide the police department toward the appropriate telecommunication and security systems. Willow found systems that not only fulfilled the department's needs, but were also cost effective. "We really want to make sure the client understands what it is they're purchasing," he says.

Community Project

Willow Construction has vast experience in the construction of community centers throughout its region. The company's most recent one –

Willow Construction

www.willowconstruction.com

- 2008 revenues: \$45 million
- Headquarters: Easton, Md.
- Employees: 65
- Services: General contracting

"We've been working with some [subcontractors] ever since we started our business in 1973."

– Andy Cheezum, vice president

Salisbury-Wicomico Senior Center in Salisbury, Md. – used its industry expertise to bring the project within its budget.

Cheezum says the company was the low bidder for the work, but the owner encountered budget issues.

Although Willow's winning bid was \$7.3 million, the company whittled the cost down to \$6.4 million through value-engineering. "It's a municipal project that had funding from many different sources, but since the start of construction, they thought they would earn additional grants or funding," Cheezum says. "But just before shelling out for a commercial kitchen, they decided to add a \$300,000 wing to the

project, which added six weeks to the schedule."

Value-Engineering Perks

The center – which broke ground in September 2008 and is slated for completion in November 2009 – has managed to stay within budget through Willow's value-engineering with the architect and the owner.

"The project as it was originally designed and bid was not going to be constructed," Cheezum says. "One thing we engineered was the roofing. We changed from a preformed standing seam rubber roof to an asphalt shingle roof. We simplified the light fixture package. We changed the interior floor and wall finishes. We reduced the site scope of work by also eliminating some of the overflow parking." ♦