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CASE STUDY



Architect Jeff Wood of Rife + Wood (center), flanked by Don Ford and Jim Smith of Building Specialists at the building site

Fast track project: This one's on steroids!

Dan Smith

By Gene Marrano

Here's the problem: The order comes in the spring to remodel three buildings, remnants of a former bible college and now a Four Square Evangel church campus, in a severely shortened time frame of four-plus months.

They must be ready for a national conference the inter-denominational organization will hold in early October.

Enter Rife + Wood Architects, Building Specialists of Roanoke and a gaggle of eager subcontractors. The result: the Four Square project

in Christiansburg will finish on time. Other buildings on the site that include a sanctuary and classrooms will be remodeled at a less hectic pace, using designs from Building Specialists.

Building Specialists first created the renovation design

in-house and then had Jeff Wood of Rife + Wood, the architect of record, sign off on it. The company managed the project as general contractor.

The downtown Roanoke

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firm recruited subcontractors that were willing to work under tight deadlines. Two years of planning went into the construction of the Cross Pointe Conference Center, a Christiansburg training facility and retreat “for pastors and leaders around the world,” says Paul Sheldon, a senior pastor. He will be the Cross Pointe center director once it is up and running. The property will be formally dedicated Oct. 9, with the international board of directors in attendance.

Building Specialists got involved with the project, which entailed the interiors for the most part, in May. It recruited Rife + Wood. “It’s been pretty wild,” says Sheldon.

Design-build

Wood calls it a design-build project, a team effort that involved a growing trend in the industry: preconstruction services. Feasibility studies are a centerpiece of that trend, having a handle on costs ahead of time.

“The traditional method is to come up with a design, then throw it out there to see what it will cost,” says Wood. “Then everybody says, ‘well, that’s too much’ and you go back to the drawing board.” There wasn’t time to do that with the Cross Pointe project, so the concept was developed with all parties involved: Rife + Wood, Building Specialists and Four Square.

Design-build is “a way to keep a project moving forward while the design and priorities are developed,” Wood says. Unpredictable construction prices in recent years have made budget estimating and the team concept more impor-



Smith, Woods and Ford

tant. Wood kept the October deadline in mind when helping Building Specialists design the remodel, using local materials when possible, looking to fabricate off site so that components could just be “plugged in” upon delivery to Christiansburg.

The design-build team was then put together “with people we knew were available.” Wood says a project like Cross Pointe would have normally taken six to eight months just to plan, check on permitting, field testing, etc. “We had to accelerate all of that.”

Four Square had to write checks sooner rather than later for asbestos inspection, soil testing and other requirements that normally hold a project up. “[They] were not that complicated—if we had eight months to build it,” says Wood of the renovated buildings.

Communication

Building Specialists met often with Sheldon and Four Square in an effort to keep

everything moving. Fast tracking a project is nothing new for the firm and the whole world knows about it: Building Specialists was the general contractor when the ABC-TV program “Extreme Makeover” taped in Blacksburg almost two years ago.

Building Specialists helped put together a team of 3,000, including 300 companies and an army of volunteers, to build a new, modern ranch home for Crawford Smith in adverse weather conditions.

“Three months of planning for a week’s build,” recalls Jim Smith, an architectural designer for Building Specialists. He was one of the key people on the Four Square renovation, along with project manager Don Ford.

A lodge, a “welcome place” and a café were the focus for Building Specialists, which had less than five months to get it all done.

“You try to design it using the basic materials available,”

says Smith, lauding his company’s subcontractors, “but the key to it is who you get to do the work.”

Montgomery County inspectors were cooperative and were aware of the timeframe. “[Otherwise] we could not have done it,” notes Smith, saying that the project was “value-engineered” first.

The café was “completely gutted inside,” according to Ford—new ceilings, floors, walls, lighting and restrooms. The old dormitory has become The Lodge, with private bathrooms, a lounge, new fire alarm system, stone fireplaces, laundry room, upgraded HVAC, etc.

“It was a great job,” says Ford.

(Gene Marrano is a Roanoke County-based freelance writer.)