

STANDARD CONSTRUCTION COMPANY, INC.

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PEOPLE ARE PRIORITY FOR LEADING ARIZONA FIRM

by Katie Gutierrez

DESPITE THE FACT THAT STANDARD Construction has become one of Arizona's fastest-growing heavy construction and general contracting firms, the company has virtually no presence on the Internet—except for several articles in which it has been praised.

"Marketing is really not so much of an issue for us," explains Diane Sutton, the company's Controller. "Our position is just to try to recruit and maintain the best possible employees, along with strengthening our résumé with quality work that meets and exceeds customer expectations."

For President Steve Sutton, who founded Standard in 2001, the company's reputation is still a very important consideration.

"We have a huge burden to overcome against the companies that have been in business for 20, 30 years," he says.

The company's youth, however, does not seem to have impeded its growth. Six years ago, Steve was Standard's only full-time employee, and the company's primary work and civil construction was performed as a subcontractor. In late 2002, Standard began bidding as a prime contractor, and, by 2003,

had retreated from the subcontract market entirely. The company had grown to include 25 employees and successfully completed jobs all over the state. Today, Standard is active in the "hard bid" market of public works for state, counties and municipalities. Occasionally, they also complete contracts for developers.

"Our niche is probably what others might classify as 'ugly work,'" Steve says. "We take on very difficult, tightly scheduled projects that are typically in tough working conditions, such as replacing waterlines in residential areas."

Standard also does infrastructure work, roadwork, underground utilities, small bridges, and small concrete structures. Most of its contracts must be completed in 180–200 days, and bring in between \$1 million and \$3 million each.

A particular point of pride for the company is the City of Surprise Tennis and Racket Complex. With 25 tennis courts on a 10-acre site—including a center court with seating capacity

for up to 10,000 spectators—it is the largest facility in the Southwest. As such, its construction posed several challenges for Standard.

"The project schedule was 90 days," Steve says, "and we had approximately 3,000 yards of concrete to pour and coordinate with other contractors. The deceptive part about the three-month schedule is that before we had to put the tennis court coating and paint on, the concrete had to cure for 30 days."

Because of the project's large scope and tight schedule, Standard was originally awarded only 17 of the anticipated 25 courts, for a total of approximately \$800,000. Once Sutton's team had begun the project, however, it became evident that Standard would be able to complete the entire project in the

“WE COULD HAVE GROWN MUCH FASTER. WE’VE CHOSEN TO CONTROL OUR GROWTH AND MAINTAIN QUALITY.”



allotted time. The company was issued a change orders—and the result is a world-class facility run by John Austin, winner of the 1980 Wimbledon mixed doubles championship. The final price tag of the project was \$1.7 million, and the facility hosted its Grand Opening in August 2007.

With a steady flow of both high-profile public works projects, Standard grossed \$12 million last year, and has grown to include 60 employees, almost three-quarters of which are field staff. Of his company's growth, Steve says, "The biggest challenge has really been personnel. Our strengths have always been our people," he adds, "maintaining good communications and training your future."

According to Diane, Standard's number one human resource tactic is to utilize current employees' happiness with their working environment to recruit others to the company.

"It's clear that when you hire people off the street, no matter what sources you're using, it's always better to go through word of mouth," she says. "When we do hire, our training system is to try to cross-train everybody as much as we can, from the very beginning. Our philosophy is that if you want to move up [in your career], you need to train your replacement."

With the significant shift toward green building, that training now includes educating employees on the Storm Water Pollution Prevention, or keeping eroded materials out of waterways. Tactics include cleaning unloaded concrete in inflatable plastics, rather than the dirt, and letting the water evaporate naturally. Additionally, contractors continually water job sites to control particulates of escaped dust.

"On a case by case basis, it may sound like overkill," Steve says, "but when you look at the volume of construction, and

the thousands and thousands of water used to clean out mixture a year, [the SWPPP] is very important. We look at it as just part of the work, just part of the training."

In a tight market, however, hiring is not currently a priority for Standard. Rather, improving the skill sets of current employees takes precedence, says Steve. Additionally, the company is looking into expanding into other areas, including job order contracts and construction manager at risk contracts.

"One of the things that we believe sets us apart from others," Steve says, "is that even though we could have grown much faster, we've chosen to control our growth and maintain quality. We're more concerned about the growth of our people." ■□