

New name says it all

By Katherine Wasiak



In June 2013, Southwest Design and Construction became the new name of a well-respected local business that has, for more than 34 years, worked in construction under the name Southwest Steel Products Ltd.

Although it has a new name, Southwest Design and Construction provides the same great service and products that it has in the past.

"From our strong roots in the agricultural sector, the company has evolved within the construction industry and expanded into the commercial and industrial markets, which now comprise the majority of our projects," explains John James, sales and marketing manager, who recently joined the management team.

Over the years, the company has designed and constructed everything from grain bins and quonsets to airplane hangars, restaurants, and office buildings. It has undertaken everything from multi-million-dollar endeavours to smaller commercial renovation projects. In addition to its headquarters in Lethbridge, Southwest Design and Construction has offices in Medicine Hat, Calgary, and Grande Prairie, which serve customers across Alberta and far beyond.

"Our new name better reflects what we do now and where the company is going in the future," says James. "It truly expresses the full range of services we provide for our customers."

That whole range of services includes providing clients with a turnkey experience. "It all starts with creating a design that meets the clients' needs, and ends when we hand over the keys to their brand-new building," he says. "Our in-house design team works closely with clients to ensure their requirements and desires become a reality. Buildings are designed specifically for a particular client in a particular location."

One very useful service is the ability to provide customers with 3-D renderings of their project designs.



"This helps people easily see the vision. For those not familiar with flat blueprints, 3-D renderings enable the ability to visualize what their building will look like once it is a reality." This includes exterior finishing touches, such as landscaping, external signage, and more. "This technique enables us to partner with developers, real estate companies and landlords to help promote locations and envision possibilities," says James. "3-D renderings can even show the traffic flow within a building."

Once planning is completed, Southwest Design and Construction's pre-engineered building partners and design teams work together to manufacture and ship the building to site, where it is erected. "Having us handle all aspects of the project makes things easy and economical for clients and lets them focus on their business, while we construct their new facility."

New technologies within the industry have made quite a difference in how the company designs and constructs buildings.

"By taking advantage of technology, we have been able to expand the complexity and scope of the projects we undertake," says Blayne Janssens, general manager, who has worked with the company for the past 15 years. "Our willingness to take on projects that may be outside some contractors' comfort zone has enabled us to expand where we build and what we build."



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Southwest Design and Construction has completed projects as far away as Mongolia, Prince Edward Island, and the Northwest Territories. "We partner with groups at the location and have our own designers, engineers, and trades who go wherever we need them to go," says Janssens.

A recent project was constructed three degrees above the Arctic Circle in Inuvik, NWT. The 12,500-square-foot Corr-Span steel airplane hangar now houses the three-plane

fleet of Aklak Air. "Working that far north posed lots of challenges," says Murray Workun, site superintendent and project coordinator. "Weather is always a variable, and stormy or cold weather can create difficulties for our workers and our construction timeline." He adds that dealing with the permafrost provided the biggest challenge for this project and had to be considered even when designing the building. In response to that challenge, the airplane hangar was constructed without a conventional foundation. Instead, they had to drill 112 steel piles, which were 12 inches in diameter, more than 35 feet into the frozen ground to provide a stable support system. "We attached a structural slab to that base and built from there."

Another highlight of this project was the massive 100-foot-wide bi-fold door. "Our supplier, Diamond Doors in Winkler, Manitoba, said this was the widest door they have ever built," says Workun with a smile. When working way up north, timing matters. This project took six months from start to finish, with the hangar being completed at the end of 2013.

Among the many projects now underway, one just outside of Lethbridge is noticeable. Southwest Design and Construction has had an ongoing relationship for several years with Monsanto Canada Inc. to develop a highly visible site along Highway 3 between Lethbridge and Coaldale. According to Dion Nagy, Monsanto Canola manufacturing lead, "This location will bring together all plant breeding, production research and commercial seed manufacturing and processing-related employees in one location. Once completed, it will make it easier for the sharing of ideas and the overall understanding of our business."

The current project is not the first undertaken by Southwest Design and Construction. "We worked with Monsanto to design and construct their initial foundation building on this site, which was completed in 2005," says Dale Harty, project manager, who has worked with the company for 15 years, and has been involved with constructing all the buildings on the site. In 2012, the canola tower was constructed for cleaning canola seed. "As a result of those projects, we have developed a great

working relationship with the Monsanto team at the Lethbridge site," says Harty.

Monsanto's Nagy agrees, "We have worked with Southwest Design and Construction on all the large building projects on this site and work well together. When the opportunity came for us to build an office on site, Southwest Design and Construction was definitely on our bidding list. Considering the services they offer, along with their competitive bid proposal, it made business sense for us to select them as our general contractor on this project."

Nagy outlined the advantages of working with Southwest Design and Construction. "They understand Monsanto's stringent guidelines for safety during construction, are knowledgeable about and use local sub-contractors, and, most importantly, were easy to work with and helpful in improving the building's functionality as we went through the design phases of the project."

The project currently in progress is a 15,800-square-foot building, of which two-thirds will be office space, including a conference room for meetings of up to 30 people. Additional amenities will include a lunchroom, labs, and a plant growth chamber area. "Currently, our local employees are split between a leased building in Lethbridge and in a trailer on site," explains Nagy. "It will be very nice to get everyone together in one office."

However, the project has not been without challenges. "We have had to work hard together to get the most practical function from our building at an economical cost, while balancing Monsanto's requirement for a building that meets our

design criteria," says Nagy. "We have found Southwest Design and Construction an open, easy to work with, customer-oriented company. We are pleased to have them lead this project."

The final design for the building was completed over the last five months of the process. "We worked with Monsanto to meet their desire to put their resources into maximizing the building's functionality," says Harty. "This project was a turnkey package where Southwest Design and Construction undertook all aspects of the project. Special kudos have to go out to the local design team, engineering team, and our local sub trades, who all went the extra mile to ensure that Monsanto will get the building they need within the project budget."

The initial site work and building pads were completed in November before the frost set in, and by taking advantage of Lethbridge's famous chinook winds, the concrete foundation was constructed in January. "We'll be erecting the building structure by the middle of March and anticipate completing the project by the beginning of September," says Harty, although he admitted that planning around the weather this winter has been a bit of a challenge. "However, so far it has worked in our favour."

With numerous projects on the go and several in the planning stages, including a micro-brewery in Lethbridge and a 108,000-square-foot manufacturing facility in Coaldale, James says Southwest Design and Construction is very busy, and that's a good thing. ♦

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