

# Constructing a Niche and Building on Strengths

## KSW Construction

Your best bet [as a growing company] comes from encouraging someone to rehire you or tell someone else to look at KSW. We have grown our business about 100 percent a year for three years purely on that strategy — referrals are the lifeblood of any contractor.

>>> *Thomas Wiegand, CEO  
KSW Construction*



By Zaher Karp

In just three short years, **KSW Construction Corporation** has carved out its niche within the mid-sized construction market. A firm contender experiencing continued, substantial growth, KSW's rapid evolution began with one of their first projects, Dave Jones Plumbing & Heating offices, which increased recognition around Hilldale Mall and led to the Great Dane hiring KSW for its location there. The popularity and recognition associated with the Great Dane brought about numerous local retail opportunities for KSW.

Last year, this evolution took another step as KSW was hired in May for the **Stoughton Wellness and Athletic Center**. Not only was this project much larger than KSW's regular fare, it had a challenging deadline of November 1, as it needed to be ready for indoor athletic events. Although there were some significant site conditions, as "they essentially found a buried forest ... and had horrible rains that started in August, [KSW Construction] dealt with it and they kept the project on schedule," says **Christine Haag**, project manager of **TFW Ventures**.

KSW Construction Corporation was founded in 2005 by **Dean Slaby** and

**Thomas Weigand**. In 2006, **Doug Slaby** joined them as a partner and vice president. Together, the three co-owners have shared some of the keys to their commercial success and emphasized the importance of understanding a company's limitations, building a strong reference base and, vitally, communication.

It's important to understand your strengths and work within them, says Weigand, who serves as CEO. "We're very strong at restaurant, retail, metal buildings and small retail centers. We try to focus our work on a few projects — too many people chase projects they aren't suitable for." Adds Dean Slaby, who fills the role of president: "We are selective. We do turn down jobs we don't feel we're matched for. Our workload needs to meet what we can do, and we have to be honest with ourselves."

This awareness can also maintain a company in a seasonally dependent market, Weigand says. "We made a pledge, when we



Thomas Weigand



Doug Slaby



Dean Slaby



Dave Jones Plumbing & Heating



The Great Dane Pub & Brewery at Hilldale



Weir Minerals

started this business, not to take every job and not to work with 100 clients a year. We want stability; from good clients that do repeat business and hold a mutual respect, and from that we have grown our business. We don't want to be a \$50 million construction company, because we don't feel our skill set is suited for that. Rather, we are comfortable in the \$15 million-\$20 million range. [With growth comes] a large animal to feed, and we do have cycles in our work, so by staying somewhat lean and limber, we are able to ride these economic waves. By not chasing too many small jobs or too many big jobs, we can focus our efforts on the projects in our [range].”

Doing quality work, says Wiegand, leads to repeat business, and the majority of KSW's projects are repeat business. “Your best bet [as a growing company] comes from encouraging someone to rehire you or tell someone else to look at KSW. We have grown our business about 100 percent a year for three years purely on that strategy — referrals are the lifeblood of any contractor.”

No project can succeed without open

communication. KSW Construction emphasizes preliminary phases early in the design of a project, where all parties can communicate and continually assess cost efficiency, dubbed the “value engineering” phases.

In construction, there is the perception that people can save money during the bidding process. KSW has found that as clients are introduced to value engineering, they become loyal to it and its cost savings.

“By developing a team — of the architects or engineers and builders — that's how you create the best outcome. When people trust us and allow a project to move in that manner, that is what has made us strong, and our clients very happy,” says Weigand.

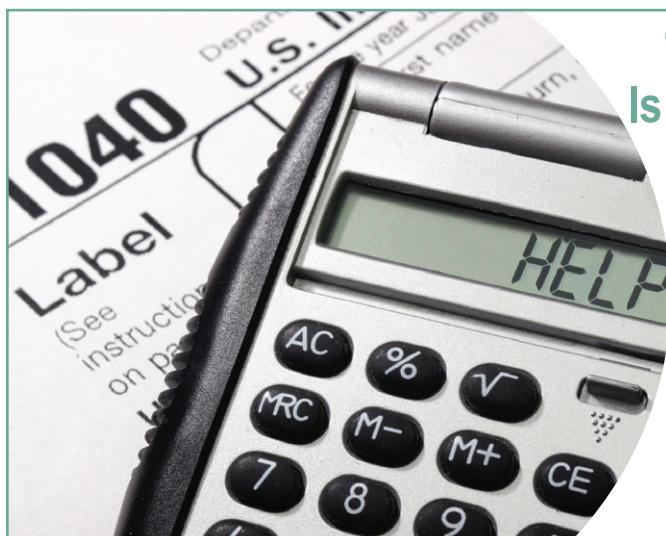
For Stoughton Wellness and Athletic Center, value engineering made a world of difference.

“We could talk about how the building functioned, and the architect was there for troubleshooting and feedback, and KSW was there to find the most cost-efficient options,” says Haag. “It made a site that had access is-

sues very manageable and possible through the amount of communication and brain-power involved.”

This sentiment was echoed by **Curtis White of JWL Management**, who worked with KSW on the Grafton Noodles & Co. “The opportunity for KSW to value engineer this project was their ability to follow the exact specifications and design intent contained in the plans and still beat out several other contractors pricing in a closed competitive bidding process.”

By recognizing their limitations and working with all parties to find the greatest savings, KSW Construction Corporation has displayed the keys to finding success in the volatile construction market. ■



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