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Feature Story - January 2005

Crime pays

Precast Pollock prison benefits contractors, community

By Angelle Bergeron

Crime does pay. Or so it seems for Flintco Inc., the Memphis-based firm that won a \$93 million Bureau of Prisons contract to build a new medium-security Federal Correctional Institution in Pollock.

The small town north of Alexandria also stands to benefit. The FCI is the latest addition to a 460-acre complex that includes a U. S. Penitentiary completed in 1999 and has already generated a lot of business for local subcontractors and promises jobs and prison-related business for at least another 50 years.

In October 2003, the Alexandria-based architectural engineering firm of Ballard & Associates partnered with Rees Associates of Oklahoma City to handle the civil and architectural aspects of the project. The local firm had previously worked with Walk-Haydel and Associates of Alexandria on the design of the USP, which was completed in 1999.

"The BOP requested local firm participation for the project," said Donald Clayton, executive vice president of Ballard & Associates.

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Located just south of Kisatchie National Forest, the heavily wooded site required a tremendous amount of clearing before Flintco could begin construction. Tyler Logging of Pollock began the tree cutting and removal in February.

The general contractor is also using locally based subcontractors such as Diamond B Construction for asphalt placement, Lamb Construction for concrete finishing and Simpson Security for security installations. Lafayette Steel Erectors of Lafayette is performing steel erection.

Using local subcontractors "is encouraged by the BOP," said Kevin Moyes, vice president of Flintco. "The local community has petitioned the BOP to use the local workforce, and it wants jobs after construction as well as during."

The site was chosen by the BOP because the final Environmental Impact Statement indicated the prison would offer "many beneficial impacts to the local economy, including providing employment opportunities," said Kay King, public information officer for the Federal BOP's construction division.

As far as Flintco is concerned, tapping into the local market is in the contractor's best interest because it almost guarantees a reliable, steady workforce, Moyes said.

The turnkey project consists of 14 buildings, including special housing units, health services, education and recreation facilities, food service, work facilities, power plant and an administration building.

Flintco mobilized at the site in February and began installing the underground utilities, said Darrell Harris, project manager.

"We are about 33 percent into the project and are now in the process of placing foundations and slabs for buildings," he added.

One of the most interesting aspects of the project is the on-site casting of tilt walls and modular prison cells.

"Precast concrete wall panels and cells are being fabricated on or adjacent to the site for construction efficiency and economic reasons and to avoid transporting these large items long distances from remote casting plants," King said.

Flintco is buying ready mix from a nearby TXI plant, which is providing about 50,000 cu. yds. of concrete.

Given the nature of the facility, the BOP won't release a lot of construction details, but Moyes said the building exteriors will consist of exposed concrete and prefinished metal panels and the interiors are primarily painted concrete walls with gypsum board or acoustic ceilings. The parking lot will be made of asphalt.

This marks the sixth time Flintco has worked with the BOP. When the BOP first adopted design-build as the preferred method of project delivery in 1997, Flintco won a contract for a \$90 million correctional facility in Forrest City, Ark.

"Before, the BOP used the design-bid-build method and ended up with a large dollar amount of claims on projects that just dragged on and on," Moyes said. By contrast, "every design-build project has been completed with no claims," he added.

Although several smaller projects have been facilitated according to other methods of project delivery, the BOP has used design-build for every major project over the past six years, King said.

"BOP's experience with design-build indicates that the process saves time and therefore costs are reduced over other delivery methods," she added.

The BOP is continually refining its processes and guidelines, which makes it a great owner to work for, Moyes said.

"It has a team of 10 to 15 people providing oversight of our design and construction," he added. "They review our documents and make sure we are in compliance with technical guidelines. They are extensively involved with the process."

A construction management firm, Infrastructure Associates of Houston, complements the BOP on-site and central office project management team.

"Infrastructure Associates was hired by the BOP to inspect the work and verify costs," King said. Project management software is one of the many tools utilized by the BOP to monitor the project through every phase, from selection and acquisition of the site throughout the design and construction process.

"Basically, we know what the client wants," Moyes said. "These facilities are designed to house prisoners and keep them locked up. The BOP has lots of guidelines to make sure they don't get out, and they want these facilities to last a minimum of 50 years."

Renovation means relocating prisoners, so the BOP wants "long-term, durable products for a combination of safety and longevity," Moyes added.

To date, the general contractor has not had trouble obtaining sufficient staffing, even though several other projects are underway in the Alexandria area. Security hasn't been a huge challenge for the contractor because the new facility will be separate from the USP and, therefore, isn't within that prison's security system.

"We're not going anywhere near the facilities where other prisoners are," Moyes said.

One of the wettest springs and summers on record has created some delays, but Flintco is still on track for the July 2006 contractual completion date.

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