

# HIRING AN EXPERT

By Patrick Wells

While the argument is out there for construction companies to be more diverse and have more variety in their pursuits, I have found that there is tremendous value in searching out and hiring a true specialist for new projects.

Coming from the construction industry and having experience with a firm that pioneered post-tension in the midwest and constructed more than 75 parking structures, I have seen many changes in our business, and the pace of that change has become increasingly dramatic over the last five years. Competition is fierce and opportunities have shrunk, causing many construction firms to seek out new markets.

Sadly, I have seen well-respected architecture and engineering firms struggle with garages because they lacked the unique knowledge set necessary to drive a smooth design and achieve a more cost-effective parking project.

## Adjusting with the Times

We consultants (I am intentionally including many of my current long-term competitors here) have benefited by making necessary adjustments during the market downturn. It hasn't been easy. Many of the opportunities we initially competed for during the last several years were lost because either our fee was slightly higher than others or we lacked an office close to the project site. As a result, the owners of those properties failed to capture the value of a true parking consultant and, likewise, failed to avoid future headaches that result from either poor functional or structural designs.

In light of the above, and as our economy continues to improve, I urge owners to consider the following before making a decision on a consultant for your next parking expansion or renovation:

- **What value lies in the fee?** A construction project can get expensive both in the field and on the drawing board. Having an experienced parking consultant on your team can save you thousands, if not hundreds of thousands, of dollars in materials and labor. This consultant will also help you decipher the best structural system for your project with a professional unbiased opinion about what materials or systems to use. For example, both systems offer excellent solutions pending your project schedule, the season of construction, and the availability and competitiveness of materials at the time a project is built.
- **How important is the office location?** A true parking consultant is a specialist who brings unmatched value to the process. Years of experience and sacrifice have made these firms what they are today. They can't physically be present in every major city across the land, and are sometimes penalized in the RFP process for not being local. Why is this an issue now, when we have excellent technology with which to communicate and collaborate?
- **Do we respect the deck?** A parking structure doesn't always offer the glitz or glamour often garnered by the larger project of which it is a part. It is often viewed as a simple structure and not given the attention it merits in terms of its effect on site traffic flow/functionality, employee convenience/satisfaction, and long-term project maintenance costs. However, when an inexperienced firm is awarded the assignment, issues in both design and construction can become overwhelming. With good choices, the parking facility can be a very exciting project!



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At the end of the day, take caution sacrificing experience for dollars. Or at least keep the famous quote by author Kurt Vonnegut in the back of your mind: "In this world, you get what you pay for!"