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## WEST WASHINGTON SCHOOL DISTRICT

### BUSINESS CASE 6: WEST WASHINGTON COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT #10 K-12 SCHOOL

In 2010, West Washington County School District #10 finalized a decision to undertake the construction of a new multi-purpose building that would house a variety of educational and support activities. The construction came in two stages. Phase-one of the project focused on building a new junior and senior high school and included the district's office, a gymnasium, cafeteria, and kitchen. The second phase involved the demolition of the existing school and the construction of the new kindergarten through sixth grade wing with 18 classrooms, art and music rooms, computer lab, grade school offices, and a new community library. In all, the building encompassed 175,000 square feet of space and a budget of \$29 million.

Not surprisingly, building new public educational facilities involved many different stakeholder groups and organizations. To be successful, a great deal of cooperation and collaboration among the key players was essential, especially since the project was publicly funded. So well before ground was broken, the District Superintendent, the county superintendent of schools, the school board, and the school district's construction subcommittee; engaged Holland Construction Services as the construction manager, and FGM, an architectural firm, to begin the planning and design process. These preparations revolved around a series of community meetings to gain critical feedback on the project. For example, it was essential to gain buy-in and agreement about the basic proposal to have one building address many functions and needs within a single facility.

During the process of gaining community input, it was decided how Holland Construction Services would organize the construction and project. Dale Stewart, Executive Secretary of the Southwestern Illinois Building and Construction Trades (SWIBT) Council, presented to the school district and was involved in helping the community to feel comfortable in making the determination that a Project Labor Agreement (PLA) would be used in this construction project. Dale Stewart, said, "Having a PLA on this project ensured that efforts would be made to increase communication, sharing information among all stakeholders, and a smooth running project across all aspects, including stakeholders participating in planning, design, and construction."

Throughout the approximately 30 months of project construction, as many as 29 contractors and 100 workers associated with 8 union locals worked on this project with an overall total of 165,000 man-hours worked. The key to the successful of this project was the organization and coordination of all of these groups and workers in a series of monthly meetings led by



**Jim Niemeyer**, Holland's field site superintendent, and **Fred Dintelman**, leading the Holland project managers. According to the Holland Construction team, "Dale Stewart strongly encouraged that the meetings take place regularly given the number of contractors, trades, and the complexity of the project. These meetings helped to create on-going lines of communication and to address unanticipated problems as they emerged." For example, inclement weather required a continuous review and adaptation of schedules and project benchmarks.

Early in the project, demolition and site preparation had to be done while school was in session. This meant that safety measures must be maintained at the highest levels and this required a lot of

communications and coordination among all project stakeholders. Moreover, special arrangements were made to ensure construction did not adversely affect students, teachers, families, and related community activities. In addition, there was an unanticipated need to do considerable asbestos removal, which required a specific set of protocols to put into effect to ensure the process was done safely and effectively.

The Holland Construction team indicated that problems like these might have caused costly setbacks and delays in the project's completion in the past. However, the PLA structure and continuous pre-job and on-site meetings involving the project manager, superintendent, contractors, business agents, and trade representatives; helped to overcome these types of problems efficiently and effectively. This might not have been the case in the 80's and 90's, when the traditional adversarial approach to labor-management relations meant that working together and solving problems cooperatively was not a priority.

*"Now it's better because there is far more unity in the trades"*

- Jim Niemeyer, Holland Construction

According to Jim Niemeyer, "it's getting a lot better." He also emphasized in the past differences between the trades might have disrupted work and caused delays. Niemeyer stated, "Now it's better because there is far more unity in the trades" – referring to efforts to iron out differences before they might create contentious issues given how work can often overlap traditional jurisdictional lines. Dale Stewart indicated, "With the use of PLAs and Tripartite agreements, job monthly progress meetings address any project concerns or challenges immediately because owners, contractors, and labor representatives feels so comfortable communicating concerns and resolving



any challenges promptly. These meetings focus all of the key stakeholders on the value each group brings to the construction process in completing the project on-time and within the budget at the highest level of performance quality, safety, and owner satisfaction.”

Niemeyer further state, “The project was completed April 2013 and came in on-time and in-budget with a zero accident rate. By all accounts, though there was a tight schedule to ensure a smooth transition into the school year, the project was a resounding success! Much of the credit was attributed to a positive work environment and the high levels of communication and collaboration on the job.” Niemeyer also stated, “It was a joy to work at the school.” He emphasized the good feelings and on-site positive work environment that was created as the project progressed.