



Loretto Hospital is one of several joint ventures that Bulley & Andrews, LLC and Ujamaa Construction, Inc. have worked on.

Working Together

Joint Venture Projects Allow Small Companies To Work On Big Projects While Giving Large Companies More Diversity

BY ANDY COLE

Work continues on the latest of several joint ventures involving Bulley & Andrews, LLC and Ujamaa Construction, as renovations are completed both inside and outside Loretto Hospital in Chicago.

According to Ujamaa President Jimmy Akintonde, the project is a good example of one job his company might have been too small to work on were it not for its involvement in joint ventures – one of many pluses he sees in working as the junior partner in a JV.

“The biggest advantage for us is being able to take a young engineering staff and give them a big construction experience,” Akintonde said. “Our staff can get the experience of working on

those bigger projects and working with a great company like (Bulley & Andrews), and they can bring what they’ve learned back to the other jobs that we do.

“It’s a real strong marketing tool for us to be able to work on a project that size. People know we’re a small company, but it helps accelerate growth when you can work on a larger project. Owners see that and those projects become more projects. It’s like growth on steroids.”

There’s nothing artificial about the results that Ujamaa has been able to produce through joint ventures. Akintonde estimates that work as the smaller partner in a JV accounts for around 40 percent of his company’s business.

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While working with a smaller firm may fulfill some minority requirements for working inside of the city, these firms wouldn't be selected for the work if they hadn't already established strong reputations working on smaller projects. The smaller firms also realize that the opportunity for larger jobs wouldn't mean much if they couldn't trust the people they're working with.

"There's value behind any joint venture when you're working with the right people," said David Rambhajan, President of Industria, Inc. "If it's a good strategic relationship, everybody wins. The larger firm brings in a company that can help get the project done well and the smaller firm gets access to work it wouldn't normally have."

Bulley & Andrews President and Chief Operating Officer Paul Hellermann has had the chance to watch Ujamaa work with his company through a number of projects and finds the relationship mutually beneficial.

"Because they're an African-American firm, it gives us entry into some markets we wouldn't normally have access to," Hellermann said. "It helps us meet our requirements, and I think their project managers definitely learn from ours."

"The smaller firms can get access to training and education they might find it hard to get access to otherwise, and they'll get to work on bigger projects that they might not have a chance to on their own."

Bulley & Andrews and Ujamaa worked together to complete labs at the Illinois Institute of Technology and are currently working on Chatham Market on Chicago's South Side. That familiarity makes future joint ventures likely because it helps to circumvent the biggest obstacle these projects usually face – lack of communication.

"Communication is one of the challenges of a joint venture," Hellermann said. "We need to make sure that their superintendent and project manager are on the same page."

"It makes it easier when you work with the same people. We're definitely familiar with their organization and they do great work. There's big upside to joint ventures when you can trust the company you're working with."

Hellermann points out that trust is certainly present with Ujamaa, and the sentiment is mutual.

"As the minority partner, you have to understand that you don't always have the last say," Akintonde said. "That makes it essential that you know who you're working with. Bulley & Andrews has



Working on projects with Bulley & Andrews allows Ujamaa Construction Project Managers to work on projects that otherwise would be too large for the company.

always had a good reputation. They deal with everyone fairly and they're truly a class 'A' contractor. We're in great hands."

Industria is currently working on a project with Wight & Company, the most recent of several joint ventures. Rambhajan says he's been a part of both comfortable and contentious joint ventures and notes a lack of communication as one main reason companies sometimes don't work well together.

That isn't limited to talking to each other on the jobsite, as Industria's President believes many problems could be fixed before the job even begins if the right questions are asked and answered.

"It's so important to ensure that there is a strong working relationship between the two firms, which includes a true protocol for communications," Rambhajan said. "Communication is important on any project, but is even more so for a joint venture."

"We need to know before we start how we're going to distribute responsibility, how the cash flow and work flow are going to work and what is expected from each firm in the joint venture. A lot of the challenges go away if you trust who you're working with, so if you've had a successful joint venture, it's likely you'll work with the same firm again. If a joint venture is planned well ahead of time, the team can focus on building a successful project."



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