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Built to Last

Fortney & Weygandt, Inc. approaches three decades of success as homegrown national general contractor

By Nancy Loyan Schuemann | Photos courtesy Fortney & Weygandt, Inc.

“Fortney & Weygandt is a contractor – we build things,” Robert L. Fortney, president of the firm, says matter-of-factly. “We are not a construction manager. We are not a developer. We are not the type to sit on a project for three years. We build things. The number one goal in our organization is to be the best contractor in the market.”

With over \$1 billion in cumulative sales and annual revenue in excess of \$120 million, F&W have built many things.

“We take and we work on areas to improve on productivity, efficiency and customer service to get more opportunities, create client relationships to accomplish more and make more money to reinvest,” Fortney says. “Decisions are not based on money. They are based on what we deem as right.”

The firm’s philosophy, since day one, has been to provide clients with the

highest quality professional construction services by being customer oriented, professional and versatile. The firm’s mission statement is not just words but is taken very seriously by everyone in the firm: “To provide and promote professional construction services. Professional meaning quality with the attitude of doing the right thing and placing the long-term presence ahead of the short-term goal.”

This flexible approach has led to 29 years of success. The firm is basically three contractors in one.

“We deal with so many markets: multi-family, retail, restaurants, hotels, assisted living, institutions and churches,” Fortney says. “When one market gets slow, we focus on a market that’s hot.”

First, the company deals with large multi-million dollar (\$4 million-plus) projects located all over the country.

A recognized leader in hotel construction, F&W has built thousands of rooms for national clients, understanding the different construction methods and standards for each.

Clients include Hampton Inn & Suites, Hilton Garden Inn, Courtyard by Marriott, Residence Inn, TownePlace Suites and others.

The firm’s first hotel was the Budgetel near the Cleveland airport and the firm prides itself in having a hotel under construction somewhere across the U.S. everyday for 10 consecutive years.

“The repeat buyer is generally a more professional buyer who respects and understands quality, timelines and customer service,” Fortney says.



TIMELY SERVICE Fortney & Weygandt, Inc. is proud to open a new restaurant for its clients, such as Applebee’s, every 24 days on average.

Another area of expertise is in multi-family construction with innovative solutions to meet owner’s needs. From single-story apartments to high-rise condominiums, from historical renovation

to new state-of-the-art construction, F&W has proven systems in place – from estimating, value-engineering through construction.

Clients include AIMCO, Larchmere Lofts and Tower Press (the firm’s first multi-family renovation). The firm’s largest project, so far, is Hunter’s Point, a \$40 million multi-family housing development renovation in San Francisco for repeat client AIMCO, the largest owner and operator of quality apartment communities throughout the United States.

Another related area of expertise is in the assisted living/Alzheimer’s/independent living market where F&W delivers the highest quality craftsmanship for high quality care. Examples include Manor Care Arden Courts, Belvedere of Westlake, The Liberty at Heather Hill, Oaks at Medina and Sunrise Development.

Second, F&W constructs \$500,000 to \$4 million projects like restaurants, free standing retail, institutional (public and private schools and universities) and churches. The firm is proud to open a new restaurant for its clients every 24 days on average. Restaurant clients include Applebee’s, Bahama Breeze, Brio Tuscan Grille, Champps, Chili’s, Longhorn Steakhouse, Capital Grille, Olive Garden, Panera Bread, Quaker Steak & Lube and Yours Truly. Institutional clients include Medina High School and Mansfield High School.

Third, the firm is a rollout contractor, covering all 50 states and working regu-

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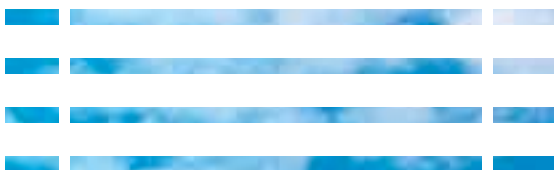
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larly on multiple projects with the same specifications, assuring reliability and maintaining consistent quality.

The Rollout Services Group deals with acquisitions, renovations and the conversion of multiple stores for national and regional retail clients within condensed time frames. Projects range from major remodels with complete turnkey accountability to millwork alterations, fixture and casework modifications and graphics/décor changeovers. A dedicated crew of construction professionals travels throughout the United States implementing these projects. The crew is comprised of about 100 F&W employees and 100-200 regular subcontractors and accounts for nearly half of F&W's work volume. Clients include CVS/pharmacy, Kmart, Wal-Mart, Alltel, TravelCenters of America and other national retail clients. Over 1,000 rollout projects are completed every year, ranging from \$250,000 to \$4 million.

An interesting example of F&W's rollout capability is the recent \$45 million conversion of OSCO/SAV-ON into CVS. In eight months, 296 stores nationwide were converted, peaking at 266 carpenters, prewalkers, truck drivers and area leaders on the road simultaneously. Over 400 flights were booked, 44 apartments leased, 415 hotel rooms booked for 17 nights each and truck drivers drove over 75,000 miles



STAYING POWER The company has built thousands of hotel rooms for national clients, including Hampton Inn & Suites (above), Hilton Garden Inn, Courtyard by Marriott and others.

delivering needed materials to crews. Crews installed over 5,100 square-foot of carpet, 122,000 square-feet of VCT, 13,650 linear-feet of cove base and

“We are probably the leading rollout contractor in the country and probably the best,” says Bob Fortney. “Clients seek us out because of our reputation.”

64,800 square-feet of red window tint.

“We are probably the leading rollout contractor in the country and probably the best,” Fortney says. “Clients seek us out because of our reputation.”

Services provided by F&W include general contracting, design/build and construction program management. In this mainstream group, the projects account for 30-40 in progress at a given time.

The firm employs a team of highly experienced estimators and administrators who develop strong working relationships with subcontractors and suppliers to provide the most competitive pricing.

One unique feature is the firm's custom estimating database and exclusive website, www.fwprojects.com that provides for more accurate and competitive bidding for every project. This site

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is for captive sub-contractors detailing all projects. The firm also has another website, www.constructionbidding.com. This site is per project with limited access by password. Sub-contractors can bid, download specs and plans, and use email for communication. Both sites are available 24/7.

"Ours is different, as there is no fee for access and there is no need to purchase drawings," Fortney say. "We offer free access and free availability. I'm a firm believer that the thickest file wins – the larger, more consistent database of subs and suppliers, the better, more consistent price for the client."

During the last six months, the websites have had over 100,000 hits with an average of 10,000 visits per week. The firm employs a three-person IT staff to manage the sites as well as all other IT functions. Fortney directs IT with a focus on proficiency and efficiency.

A related technology tool is FW Main, an estimating/project management model that allows the firm to assist in managing daily operations, like pulling up a particular sub-contractor's listing to view a detailed history of all bids offered and awarded.

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BUILDING ABODES Fortney & Weygandt's multi-family construction projects, include Hunter's Point in San Francisco, Larchmere Lofts in Cleveland (above) and more.

Through the construction phase, project managers and field superintendents lead self-performing crews and qualified subcontractors and suppliers to the successful completion of a project.

Field superintendents are provided with the tools for success. Each is equipped with a laptop computer, utilizing a custom-written SuperView program to process paperwork and handle administrative duties while in the field. The program won a Bronze Hammer Award for work in technology by *Constructech Magazine*.

Safety is also a high priority. The firm employs a full-time safety officer who is certified to teach the required 10 and 30-hour OSHA classes.

People come first at Fortney and Weygandt. Employees are trained in F&W's quality standards. They are hired and trained into the system. Project managers are given ownership to the project and with that responsibility comes trust. The firm employs nearly 200 with 60 based at its headquarters, the rest field staff.

"Working at F&W is the best job they'll ever have and the worst job they'll ever have," Fortney says. "I give them responsibility and expect them to handle it. All are held accountable for their own actions. To succeed at F&W, one needs to take on the responsibility and handle it in order to become valuable. Whether you think you can

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or can't, you're right. We want and have people who think they can."

He adds, "We have people who have been with us for 20 years, people who love to build. We have a stable, long-term workforce. We do our best to keep a long-term workforce."

In the design/build area, F&W's teams with architects and engineers with design experience specific to the project in determining costs and schedule goals. The advantages of this design/build approach are many. Project budget and costs are determined early, allowing time for appropriate financing opportunities. The team-oriented approach keeps goals in sync and costs down. With F&W's experienced staff, comprehensive value-engineering and alternative material and construction methods can offer added value. With over 25 years of proven experience, the F&W design/build approach has delivered projects on time, on budget and has met client's expectations of quality. Design/build projects



DIVERSE MENU Restaurant clients include Bahama Breeze (above), Brio Tuscan Grille, Champpps, Chili's, Longhorn Steakhouse, Olive Garden, Panera Bread and Quaker Steak & Lube.

include office buildings, hotels, manufacturing facilities and warehouses.

Some projects are best served through F&W's construction program management, allowing for the firm's professionals to coordinate all facets of design and

construction in a customized manner and working with the client's team from pre-project planning and development through completion. This long-term process has included retail stores and restaurants.

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Fortney and Weygandt wasn't always this successful.

"The only way you learn is by failing," Fortney says. "It's not how you fail. It's how you deal with that failure that determines the outcome."

"One of my biggest failures was when we began," Fortney explains. The firm started when Bob Fortney and then business partner, Bob Weygandt (who left the firm in 1984 to return to practicing architecture) incorporated in 1978 with a pooled \$250. "In the first year or so, we got a lot of work, three to four major projects (tenant build-outs in malls) and focused all of our efforts in successfully completing the work. When the jobs were complete, we had nothing. We had to basically start over. Ever since that time, I have never stopped marketing, developing clientele, bidding and looking out for what's next."

The firm employs a two-person business development team.

"I've developed a philosophy that I don't worry about the past," Fortney says. "I concentrate on the future. I hope



CLASS ACT Institutional clients include Medina High School (above) and Mansfield High School.

the highlight of my life happens in 50 years."

Fortney and Weygandt has come a long way from its inception in the basement of Weygandt's Cleveland Heights home to its current custom-designed and built headquarters. Actually, it

began when Bob Fortney was a child. Instead of reading comic books, young Bob bought home plan books and critiqued them. He enjoyed building with Lego's and Lincoln Logs, building tree forts and watching contractors build new homes in his Avon Lake neighbor-

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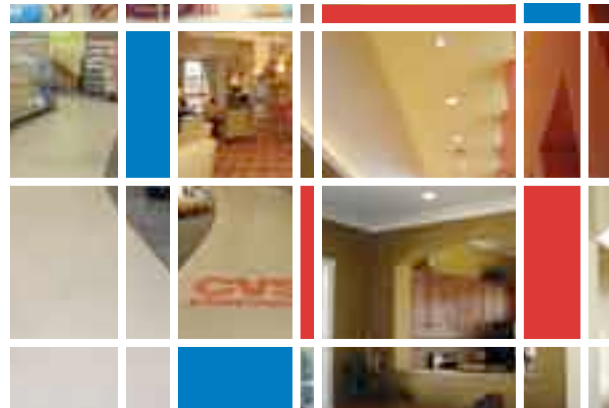
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hood. This path led to Miami University in Oxford and a degree in architecture. After, he worked as an architect on staff at the Cleveland Clinic Foundation and in construction management at a local architecture firm.

"My architecture background is a benefit to clients. I have the ability, a strength in architecture," Fortney says. "I can read intent. Knowing what a client is getting and what he's looking for can point out issues before they can become a potential problem."

"It's a total belief in one's self," Fortney says of his personal philosophy. "When I was brought up it was drilled into me that I could do and be anything I wanted. What has strengthened me is my belief in my ability, in my staff and my family and in going through a major medical crisis [which was a kidney transplant]."

"I'm doing exactly what I love to do," Fortney says. "You have to have a job to retire. I am doing what I was put on earth to do. I've been blessed with more fortunate things. I am extremely grateful."

Family is important to Fortney as evidenced by the number of photographs in

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his private office. Married 27 years, he and his wife Ruth met one month after he began F&W.

“She helped me from step one,” he says. “My wife and four daughters provide me everything I need. They provide me the strength to do what I’m doing.”

Though not directly involved in project management, accounting or human resources, Fortney has learned to delegate to staff that handle the firm’s day-to-day operations. He does oversee bids and negotiates contracts and is active with IT, improving the firm’s proficiency and efficiency.

Fortney also gives back to the community through charitable giving. Over \$300,000 was given last year to several local and national charities. Those benefiting included the Cleveland Christian Home, Cleveland Scholarship Program, Cleveland Food Bank, Coats for Kids,

“Fortney & Weygandt, Inc. is my firstborn,” Bob Fortney says. “It doesn’t need my constant care to survive, which, hopefully, proves I’m a good parent.”

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Fortney is quick to point out that he is not Fortney and Weygandt, Inc.

“The secret behind Fortney & Weygandt is not Bob Fortney,” he says. “My strength is that I have a pretty good ability to organize and allow people to act on their strengths and lead them on the right path. Our strength is that we are financially stable.

“It’s an organization. I head it but it’s a solid organization. With or without me it has the ability to be successful in the field of construction. F&W is my firstborn. It doesn’t need my constant care to survive, which, hopefully, proves I’m a good parent.”

Fortney adds that growth is essential for success in any business, but that taking risk is not for everyone.

“Some people may not want to grow,” he says. “I want to grow. I see Fortney and

Weygandt continuing to get better at what we do and evolving into different areas to whatever level it takes us.” **P**

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(vûr'sə-təl, -tīl') adjective

1. Capable of doing many things competently
2. Capable of turning easily from one to another of various tasks
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