

The Philadelphia Regional Produce Market Project part three

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In the end, you're measured not by how much you undertake but by what you finally accomplish.

Trump: the Art of the Deal, 1987.
– Donald Trump

In January 2010 we introduced you to the Philadelphia Regional Produce Market project, whose 228 refrigerated dock areas were getting outfitted with dock levelers, overhead doors, fire doors, and air curtains by a collaborative group of IDA members. In April 2010, with the installations well underway, we provided an update to this unique and very interesting project. Now October, with the installations complete, we offer you a final look at this project from the perspective of the installation team.

ID&OI: Let's give credit where credit is due. Can you tell us who all were involved in the installation?

American Overhead Employees: Joe Swope Jr, Project Manager; Joey Swope, Assistant Project Manager; Devon Swope, Assistant Foreman; Eric Bentley, Foreman. Lead Install Techs - Chris Devos, Matt Thomson, Lee Russell, Dave Miles, William Keller. Apprentices - Eric Russell, Bill Novak, Rob Puchino. (All of the above are Local 37 and 1906 Mill Wrights and Carpenters.) Office Support - Rachel Hylton, Judy Kolaris, Frank Mortimer.

Warehouse Technology Employees: Mike Struempfler; Anne Struempfler; Jim Oster.

Albany Employees: Mike Weiland; Jeff Konetzki; Ryan Schaffner; Rich Noechel.

ID&OI: Please describe the installation process for the job.

Joey Swope: Install began in October 2009 with truckload after truckload of Blue Giant dock levelers, immediately followed by sectional doors. This part of the job was moving extremely well... until Old Man Winter showed his ugly face. We were then hit with storm after storm, some of which with snow falls of over two feet. At that point the exterior walls and roof did not exist. There was decking but that did not stop what was being thrown at us. Needless to say, we had to break out the shovels. Dock door installs take much longer in one to two feet of snow, and since the exterior walls were not going according to plan, that gave Roger and Josh Carlton (owners of NCS) plenty of time to install the interior walls for our high speed doors. Devon and Eric went at this full force. While they were installing the high speed doors, the dock and dock door install tapered down to an end. The snow was melting and the rolling grilles started to fly up with Matt Thompson and Chris Devos hard at work. The water started to trickle down, leaving the interior of the building looking more like a lake with some parts of the building holding as much as four to six inches of water. The mechanics were all wearing Gortex wrapped boots inside of goulashes, which helped with the cold, wet feet but did not speed up the install process.

Continued on page 80

MEMBERSHIP

continued from page 78

Spring was a sight for sore eyes and gave us plenty of time to finish up the rolling grille install and other odds and ends. When the rolling grille install was starting to taper down and summer was rolling in, the shelters started going up. Devon and Eric were still plugging away at the high speed doors, but Chris Devos was ready to take on a new project. Chris assembled the Fairborn soft-sided shelters on the ground and lifted them into place using a manual hand crank to avoid the charge of \$500 a day to operate a forklift. Just as Chris and his crew of guys had assembled enough shelters to bring in another crew to start hanging, we got hit with another major storm. This storm came rolling through with reported tornadoes and water spouts all over the area, picking up shelters and throwing them around as though they were nothing. The storm left just as quickly as it came, leaving us with a total of eight damaged shelters.

Other than the storm and brutal heat waves summer brought us, everything was moving along as planned and our budget was looking pretty good. The last things left on the job were the strip curtains and electrical start-up. Albany offered to fly in Jeff Konetzki, head of Service and Customer Relations, as well as high speed door guru. Jeff lent a hand in the start-up of the doors and also verified that all doors were installed as per manufacturer's specifications before the doors were fired up. The start-up of the Albany Door and Dock Levelers went very smoothly with minimal warranty issues. That says a lot considering the amount of equipment on this job! All in all, it was a smooth install run by a good group of contractors and an excellent group of door mechanics.

ID&OI: What were the biggest challenges of the installation? Were there delays and, if so, why?

Devon Swope: One of the biggest challenges we ran into was keeping track of all of the equipment and making sure nothing got destroyed. As you could imagine, the job site was huge and there were tons of trades working around each other. The staging area



that you were assigned on Monday was probably not your staging area on Monday afternoon. There were insulated walls everywhere, piping, racking and everything else you could think of... One minute our equipment was in Section A; the next day it was on the opposite side of the building and, no one knew how it got there. The other challenge was the weather – the snow, sleet and rain pushed back everyone's schedule. Bad weather made things rough – installing doors and docks with no walls up on the exterior of the building and only decking keeping the elements from coming in through the top of the building. I guess we were a little better suited working in those types of conditions compared to the other trades considering we are servicing freezer and cooler doors daily for our customers, but it was a challenge nonetheless.

Continued on page 82



MEMBERSHIP

continued from page 80

ID&OI: How hard was it to manage the cash flow?

Joe Swope: On a large job such as the Philadelphia Produce Center, initial capital must be in place to prepare for startup expenses and mobilization. The following factors needed to be taken into consideration and capital needed to be in place to account for them:

- Initial capital for a minimum of two months worth of labor expenses;
- Initial capital for required equipment that would be designated to the jobsite and unable to be relocated from other departments within the company, such as job site trailer, welding machines and associated equipment, forklifts, scissor lifts, gang boxes, tarps (count on plenty of bad weather), electrical hand tools..... etc.

Since we were prepared for this initial cost outlay for the project our overall corporate cash flow was not affected. However, early on during our start-up phase, funding for the job was held up and payments to the subcontractors were delayed for several months. The proper preparation on our end turned a head-on collision into a minor speed bump.

ID&OI: Were there special safety or other considerations with this job?

Joey Swope: Yes, we held weekly Toolbox meetings and we supplied special safety uniforms—bright lime green with reflective tape and lettering. We were also dealing with one of the coldest and snowiest winters in Philadelphia's history. Our job site trailer was equipped with heat and A/C, microwave and refrigerator and it also had a full OSHA-approved First Aid station. This gave the guys the opportunity to take breaks from the below zero temperatures (with wind chill), get warmed up and have a hot meal. For those who have worked in the field, warm toes and hot food and drink in your stomach go a long way to keeping a guy's wits about him and keeping a productive schedule.

ID&OI: Did anything unusual/odd/funny occur during the installations?

Devon Swope: The strangest thing that took place on the job was also the biggest



problem we experienced. A crate of nine Albany motors disappeared. Just like that – \$10,000 was gone. Thankfully, Mike Weiland, General Manager of Albany Door Systems, and Craig Jones, Vice President of Albany Door Systems, along with Mike Struempfler, President of Warehouse Technology, stepped up to the plate and offered to split the costs three ways. It cost us our profit, but it's better than taking a \$10,000 hit. We could not have asked for a better group of people to work with on this project.

ID&OI: What were the lessons learned from this job?

Joe Swope: Heed this warning... follow up all important meetings, scheduling, specific requests that were confirmed and important conversations (whether with the GC, CM or other sub-contractors on the job) with emails; create a job folder for your emails and save them! Do this on any size job whether a \$10,000 contract or \$1,000,000 contract, you will prevent headaches, arguments and loss of money. You can thank me later; although I would rather you send me 20 percent of the money you save! Simply depending on your memory or someone else's will lead to trouble and frustration.

Email, email, email... I learned my lesson early on. We asked the plumbers onsite if they would be able to offset their trap primer tubes several inches over along the wall so that we would have clearance to mount our control boxes for our Albany UltraFast High Speed doors (total 136 doors). They were very accommodating



during our conversation, which was not documented or followed-up by email... Consequently we had to have brackets manufactured at a cost of \$15 per door in order to straddle the trap primer tubes which were not offset. While this is not a large loss in the overall scheme of things, a loss is a loss, and it was a loss that could have been prevented.

ID&OI: What 'hints' would you tell our readers about taking on this type of work?

Joey Swope: First things first, do you have enough manpower and are they there to work? You cannot just throw anyone on

Continued on page 84



a job like this and assume it will get done correctly. We did have the manpower, and we trusted our guys to get the job done. The job was led by my brother (Devon Swope) and my best friend (Eric Bentley), both of whom I trust completely. But it didn't stop there. Matt Thompson and Chris Devos both have over 20 years in the door industry and I have never seen sectional doors go up so quickly.

Next, do you have the capitol? As we already talked about, a job like this costs a lot of money to get started and you will not see any income for 60-90 days. Make sure you have plenty of money to put out for equipment, payroll, and also leave enough money in the bank to keep your day-to-day operations going. You do not want to stay awake at night wondering if you will be able to make payroll at the end of the week.

Lastly, do not put off those who have put their trust in you. YOU HAVE OTHER CUSTOMERS! We built our company on excellent service and our customers expect nothing less than that. My dad told me from day one, "It's easy to get a customer, but it's even easier to lose one." Make sure you can keep crews out on the road servicing the accounts that built your company. My dad built this company from one man in a 1982 Ford pickup truck. His first two customers were US Food Service and Vistar and they are also our best customers. You cannot put your best customers on the back burner, because when the big job is over you may or may not get the service work, but if you keep all of your existing customers happy, you will not lose them!

ID&O: Would you take on this large of a project again?

Joey Swope: Yes, and hopefully another one will come along in the not-too distant-future. We are not your typical Overhead Door Company; we are licensed electricians as well as overhead door and dock leveler technicians, which gives us an upper hand on large and small projects. General contractors do not want to deal with multiple subs to do a door and dock install. My dad, Joe Swope, is a licensed electrician with 30 years in the construction industry and has been on everything from a one-door install to wiring up a nuclear power plant. My Brother, Devon Swope, is a Local 1906 Millwright, and I am a certified electrician but I spend my time in sales and marketing. We are able to sit down and see a job from all sides of the spectrum and not have to guess or rely on others to give us good pricing. We can then turn around and give an end user or GC a 100% turnkey mechanical and electrical install, of which we are very proud. Not only do we hope to take on this large of a project again, but with this experience we are in a good position to win the large jobs.

Editor's Note: A news release announced that the Philadelphia Regional Produce Market is introducing a new name and logo preceding the move from the market's current location to the new, state-of-the-art facility, now planned for January 2011. The new name is Philadelphia Wholesale Produce Market (PWPM). The name was developed strategically to position the new facility

as a "wholesale produce market" capable of servicing customers within a 500-mile radius of the new location. The move was delayed so that PWPM can take every step possible to ensure that the building is in perfect condition at the time of move-in for both the merchant's and the customer's benefit. 

The Project

The Philadelphia Regional Produce Market is a \$218.5 million public-private project that includes 20 acres of vendor spaces, loading platforms and offices. The new facility features 228 enclosed and fully refrigerated 50 foot wide dock areas.

What's Involved...

With a project of this stature you can expect there are many dock levelers, overhead doors, and curtains involved. Below is the breakdown of equipment necessary for the job:

- 227 Blue Giant Hydraulic Dock Levelers
- 227 Fairborn Soft Sided Dock Shelters
- 235 Overhead Sectional Doors
- 117 Overhead Door Rolling Steel Security Grills
- 10 Overhead Door Fire Rated Rolling Steel Doors
- 136 Albany Hi-Speed Doors
- 47 Berner Air Curtains
- 46 TMI Strip Curtains

Delivery on the above equipment started in October 2009 and continued through mid-February.

Who's Involved...

The principal players from the door and access systems industry include:

- Mike Struempfer (President), Warehouse Technology, Inc. and Overhead Door Company of Greater Philadelphia (a division of Warehouse Technology)
- Joseph Swope, Jr (President), & Joey Swope (Vice President), American Overhead Door & Dock

Manufacturers:

- Albany Door Systems, Blue Giant Equipment Corporation, Overhead Door Corporation, Fairborn USA, Berner International, & TMI