

Capital Concrete proves little guy can make it

BY ODOT STAFF

For the Sentinel

Though the current economy reminds some people of earlier hard times in Oregon, such as the 1980s, Ken Garcia isn't experiencing any déjà vu. When unemployment was high in 1987, he simply founded his own firm, Capital Concrete Construction.

Twenty-one years and more than 30 additional employees later, Capital, headquartered in Aumsville, is an increasing presence in the construction industry, excavating, laying pipe and pouring concrete on projects up and down the Willamette Valley. Recently, the company completed one of many jobs it has performed as a prime contractor for the Oregon Department of Transportation, replacing three bridges and repairing two others in Cottage Grove.

Once again Garcia faced tough conditions, and once again he mastered them.

ODOT had promised Cottage Grove stakeholders—city officials, state legislators, county commissioners and local business owners—that it would limit the closure of nearby London Road Bridge to between

Aug. 20 and April 1, meaning that the structure and roadway would be reopened by the important summer travel season.

That commitment was jeopardized when utility work on the project fell seven weeks behind schedule. Capital Concrete committed itself to picking up the slack.

"We accelerated our pace, working six days a week, 12 hours a day," said Garcia. "Nights aren't productive, or we would have put a crew on then, too. Most of my employees have been with me 10 or 20 years, and we know we can count on each other."

Garcia is no stranger to hard work. He started his construction career as an apprentice to a cement mason, launched his company during a recession, and began with small jobs such as curbs and sidewalks.

"Eventually, you get bored and look for bigger challenges," Garcia said. "We moved up to small bridges for the Forest Service and then started bidding on ODOT work."

To keep to the new schedule, Garcia and his crews canceled vacations and worked through the winter, including during snowstorms.

"We did what we had to do—wore lots of clothes, added warming fires to the job site,"

he said.

Concrete is affected by cold, too, and requires precautions similar to those used by humans: Hot, rather than cold, water has to be added to the mix; once poured, the concrete has to be covered with insulated blankets to set properly.

Though Capital is certified as a minority-owned business and emerging small business, it is ultimately evaluated and rehired based on the quality of work it produces, and in ODOT the company has a very satisfied customer.

"Capital worked with us by putting in overtime, bringing in additional workers and equipment at critical junctures, and using higher strength concrete to accelerate the schedule," said Russ Olson, project manager at ODOT. "They did a seven month job in five months and enabled us to keep our promise to Cottage Grove."

Garcia sums up his philosophy this way.

"Some people think only the big guys can make it in this industry," he said. "But even a little guy can do big things."

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