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WINTER 2006

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BUILDING THE FOUNDATION

by Dana Turner

MALCOLM BRIGGS IS THE PRESIDENT, owner, and founder of ICR Construction Services, a company that is no stranger to success. Founded in 2001, ICR (Industrial, Commercial, and Residential) has been a forerunner in the St. Louis area. For Briggs, the decision to start his own construction business was a practical one, motivated by a desire to spend more time with his family. For 15 years he was a sports broadcaster for NBC in St. Louis. He was the voice of the St. Louis Rams, giving play-by-play commentary on sports, winning plays, and the art of

the game. "I knew I wasn't going to be on TV forever. I've got two kids, and when you're doing sports you're home at 11:30 or midnight. Your kids are in bed and when you get up, your kids are in school. That's not a life conducive to raising kids," he says.

Construction isn't a new trade for Briggs. While a communications major in college, he also worked construction on the side. Learning the ins and outs of the business early on encouraged Briggs to go back to it later. He decided to "take that experience and

Above: National City Bank

build on it from there.” Thus, ICR Construction Services was born.

ICR Construction benefits from Briggs’ early construction experience, and many of its qualities distinguish it from the average construction company, among them the fact that ICR is a minority contractor. The company is certified with the Minority Business Council, Missouri Department of Transportation, Illinois Department of Transportation, and St. Louis International Airport. This places it in the company of more than 56,000 African American-owned construction companies in the U.S.

BUILDING BLOCKS

Briggs carried his success as a newscaster to his contracting company, taking on many prestigious building projects. Next year, ICR is expected to do \$20 million in business. This is quite impressive, considering that ICR did \$350,000 in its first year of business. He credits his success to

some complicated strategies, but also to common sense. In Briggs’ eyes, two main building blocks are necessary for the success of minority contractors: building relationships and reputation. A good company must be dedicated and have a strong commitment to doing good work consistently. “We’re willing to go the extra mile,” says Briggs. This strategy is paying off. “We’re doing work for some Fortune 500 Companies, and looking to become a sole source vendor for more big companies.” Briggs is personally committed to making sure his projects meet the highest standards. “You’ve really got to come through. It doesn’t matter what color you are. At the end of the day, if you didn’t do your job, you didn’t do your job. We’ve got to do everything we can to make sure that the customer is pleased with the end product that they came to us for,” he explains.

Relationship building is key. For example, a minority contractor should surround himself with good people.

Below: St. Louis Metro



And Briggs has done just that. "I've had some good mentors to help me along the way. They've been very good in giving me legal counsel and advice about how to grow my business. Overall, they've been good friends I can call on."

Briggs also suggests developing relationships with companies that will require construction services throughout the years, rather than focusing on one-time deals. "When you deal with companies like National City Bank, you know they'll be building banks for a while. You'll have the opportunity to work with them for as long as your company performs." Briggs has formed long-term relationships with Boeing, Walgreens, and American Airlines. "Those companies are always doing work, and they need people who will perform for them. If you do things the right way, then they'll think about you when they have the next project coming up," he says.

If there's one thing Briggs has learned over the years, it's how to use common sense and to stay grounded. "Don't chase revenue—chase profit. And don't let your eyes get ahead of your stomach. Don't just take a job because someone gives you an opportunity and it's worth a lot of money. At the end of the day, you need to ask yourself, 'Is it really worth it?'"

For Briggs, many of his private sector projects have definitely been worth it. One project he is particularly proud of is the National City Banks project. National City is a Fortune 200 Company based out of Cleveland, and the president is a personal friend of Briggs. "The people at National City have made a concerted effort to reach out to women- and minority-owned businesses by giving them an opportunity to be successful. I'm pleased that we're able to garner a

relationship with them." National City has been happy about the relationship as well. "With our performance, we've made them feel good about stepping out and working with us," he says.

Although there are many advantages to being a minority contractor, the road can be bumpy. "We're out here trying to do things the right way, but it's hard because we're sometimes an afterthought," says Briggs, as he

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describes some of the challenges that he must overcome as a minority contractor. There are companies who want minority participation but are not necessarily willing to give the contractors the best available work. Minority contractors may be the last to be considered. Briggs says, "They will think of us after some of the big generals have gotten the job. Then the (company) thinks, 'Well, now let's go and try to find some minorities who can help us.'"

Although it's frustrating, Briggs doesn't let it get him down. He combats the problem by being a general contractor. "I don't do a lot of subcontract work. I want to be paid first and not be the last guy to get paid. I want to be in control of my own destiny." Being the main man in charge has been very lucrative for Briggs. "I'm tier one. I'm with the owner of the project, and I'm doing the deal with him." Maintaining control of the projects he works on has produced enviable results.

But things weren't always so sweet

for ICR, which started out with only two office employees in 2001. Then ICR signed with the operators', laborers', and carpenters' unions, and their fortunes began to change. In 2005, ICR did close to 16 million in sales. "I like to grow 10 to 12 percent a year, net. That's what I shoot for, but with construction, the business is pretty tight. You're lucky if you get

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7 to 10 percent," he explains. Today, the company's number of workers fluctuates between 30 and 60 within the three unions. Briggs is thankful for every bit of growth within the company. "Say your prayers and eat your Wheaties. It's not easy, but we just get out there and we hustle," he proclaims.

BUILDING A STRONG FUTURE

Many plans are in the works for ICR Construction. In the future, they intend to do both commercial and residential work, building homes and multifamily units in addition to offices and stores. Briggs is certainly an optimist with a winning attitude, determined to shine in the world of construction as he has in the world of broadcasting. He proclaims, "For those who are looking for a good contractor who just happens to be a minority, they can give me a call." ABQ