

Design-build firm adds churches to its talents

GL Barron has three church projects under way, in addition to office, restaurant work

By **CHRISTINE PEREZ**
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FORT WORTH — GL Barron Construction, known in the area for building El Fenix restaurants and other commercial projects, has secured deals for three major church projects in North Texas.

The company will design an 11,000-square-foot multipurpose building, the first of several planned, for Southlake Boulevard Presbyterian Church. It will also design and build a new campus for Hulen Street Baptist Church in Fort Worth and a 26,000-square-foot Family Life Center for Robinwood Baptist Church in Seagoville.

"Church projects have really come on strong over the last several years," said Greg Barron, owner of GL Barron.

He said this is partly due to his work as a leader in Bible Study Fellowship International and other ecumenical ministries, but mostly because of the experience his company has with religious projects.

"We have become experts in that particular market because it has evolved," he said. "We know square-foot costs, acoustical values and relationships of seating in

worship facilities. We know to ask the right questions."

Barron founded his company in 1988 to do general commercial construction. The firm, which he said is a "vertical contractor," does mostly client-based projects and stays away from residential, multifamily or civil jobs.

The company is a rarity among mid-size construction companies because it is a true design-build firm, said Barron. He has three architects on staff, and tries to handle design for about 80% of his construction projects.

"A lot of firms say they're design-build, but what sets us apart is we are designers, and we are builders," Barron said. "We work from both the left side of the brain and the right side of the brain."

In addition to churches, Barron Construction also specializes in office and industrial projects. In June, it will break ground on a new American headquarters for Vienna, Austria-based ISIS Papyrus, a 45,000-square-foot, six-building campus in Southlake. The high-tech, European-style project is a far cry from the churches GL Barron frequently builds.

Edith Letz, business development manager of ISIS Papyrus America Inc., said the project required a designer who could think outside of the box.

"It's amazing how GL Barron has been able to relate to what the owners have in mind for the project," she said. "It's a very creative concept, and they were able to take it out of the owner's imagination and put it on paper."



BARRON:
Branching out

Barron also does restaurant work for Spring Creek BBQ and El Fenix, a chain of 16 Mexican restaurants in the Dallas-Fort Worth area.

Barron said his company usually has between seven and 10 projects under construction at any given time, and just as many in the design phase. A customized Web-based management system helps him keep track of it all. It also provides another benefit for clients, he said.

"Any owner, whether he's in Singapore or Kansas City, can go onto our Web site and look at the schedules, see photographs of the job, look at actual plans and any changes to them, and read a copy of the weekly job meeting minutes," he said. "And each day, our superintendents will go into a template and do a report on the weather, his visit to the site and what work was done that day. Our whole e-management system links the field, office, client, architectures and engineers."

When the ISIS Papyrus project gets under way, three Web cameras will take live shots from different angles every minute. People associated with the development will be able to get an actual up-to-the-minute look at the project in progress.

Barron said his company, which generates between \$15 million and \$20 million in revenue, has enjoyed a steady annual growth of about 25% to 35% for the last several years. He said he isn't after volume, but meaningful, profitable projects and business relationships.

"We have a very stable capital base, we're very liquid," he said. "We're not out there with a lot of physical assets that we have to put to work. Our primary asset is our people, they are our working capital."

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