

Reinvestment, training help PIC build a foundation for growth

There's no blueprint for building a successful industrial coatings contracting business.

But if you want to see how it's done, you might look no further than Professional Industrial Coatings, Inc., (PIC) of Kernersville, N. Car.

That the firm has grown from a scratch start in 1997 — minus the \$2,200 company president and founder Brad Joyce had in his pocket at the time — to a bustling company that employs an average of 30 people and turned more than \$7 million in 2003 revenues is a story in itself.

But more intriguing than its past is the future of this company, which features flooring, plural-component application and general industrial divisions.

"It takes a certain type of contractor to do the things we do," says Joyce. "I guess we're always thinking out of the box. I don't want us to be known as the cheapest contractor. I want us to be known as the best. Then our growth will take care of itself."

Joyce's model for success is based on a few simple principles. They include:

Sell quality. PIC offers high-end flooring and coating systems that many of their competitors are simply unable to offer. As a result, PIC has the luxury of choosing not to pursue lower-margin jobs that have lesser quality standards.

"We want to provide the best result and best service to our customer for a fair price," says Joyce. "We show them the right way to do something and we'll walk away from the job if they want to cut corners."

"We just turned down a \$200,000 job because they wanted to do it the



Custom equipment, such as the flooring rig (above left) and Zebtron application rig (above right and right) give PIC a competitive edge, according to company president Brad Joyce.



wrong way. They told us we didn't even have to give them a warranty, but you're only as good as your last job in this business. We simply couldn't afford to do it that way."

Delegating to others what they do best. In 2000, Joyce recognized that for the company to grow further, he'd need capable help, and not the kind that wielded a spray gun. He found some in John Elliott, a safety manager at a local manufacturing facility who was willing to make a career change. Elliott came aboard full time in September

2001, when he was appointed vice president.

"John does all the scheduling, he does all the profit and loss statements on projects, he'll order the materials — all the organizational stuff is what he's good at doing," says Joyce. "It allows me to focus on public relations and marketing, which is what I do best.



PIC President Brad Joyce (left) and PIC Vice-president John Elliott

"The biggest challenge for me was letting go, but I knew I had to in order for us to get to the next level," he adds. "We're at a point now where everyone understands their role, and I can allow them to be good at what they're good at doing."

That said, Joyce is no stranger to the tools of the business. He still personally handles some of the company's most challenging flooring projects, such as

vertical polyurea applications.

"I've got the experience, and I like doing it," says Joyce. "They're challenging procedures. We're getting some guys up to speed, but some of these systems leave little room for error."

Keeping the focus on relationships. When Joyce brought Elliott aboard, he freed up some of his time for an occasional round of golf or dinner with a client.

"I'll do what I can to get a customer out of their element a little bit, to get

to know them and understand their needs," says Joyce. "And once we're on a job, I make a lot of check-up calls, a lot of 'how's it going' calls."

Such relationships allow Joyce to negotiate rather than bid most projects, and the result is a win-win for both parties. The arrangement often allows PIC to install higher quality systems, and the higher quality systems keep customers loyal to PIC, thereby further strengthening the relationship.

"In the end, I want our customer to

THE GROUND FLOOR

feel that we're not necessarily a vendor anymore. We're part of their team."

Investing in equipment. This might be the area in which PIC most distinctly separates itself. Joyce estimates that the company owns \$4 million in equipment, much of which is custom-designed by Joyce for particular applications.

"I've always put money back into the company," says Joyce. "I didn't

"Infrastructure rehab is a very good business to be in right now and it's only going to get bigger," says Joyce. "U.S. municipalities will be spending billions in the coming years on these projects."

Other equipment is not nearly as demanding of capital, but equally innovative. A 42-foot trailer, for example, serves as a custom flooring rig specifically for General Polymers

among the first to gain certification to apply Sherwin-Williams' brand of General Polymers flooring systems, which produce high-performance, durable and attractive floors up to 300 mils thick. Certification required classroom sessions and on-site training, but the company can now offer a flooring solution that few of its competitors can provide. Similarly, application of Zebtron systems requires training and certification.

"Again, it allows us to compete in areas where much of our competition isn't qualified to compete," says Joyce. "And these applications result in long-term solutions for our customers. And we're the only contractor I know of capable of doing polyurea flooring systems while a plant is in service."

Partnering for success.

Sherwin-Williams Industrial and Marine representative Kevin Morris and Commercial Store Manager Brian Huffman are integral members of the PIC team, according to Elliott.

"If we need something, they make it happen," he says. "I can't tell you the number of times they've both come out, put on work clothes, given us sales leads, helped us solve technical concerns, or driven to see a customer with us."

"They're almost like employees that I don't have to pay," adds Joyce.

SOLID FOUNDATION

Joyce is confident he's laid a foundation to grow from two flooring crews and two plural-component application crews to three of each in the near future. He's also ready to find a new home for the company, which has outgrown its 6,000-square-foot shop.

"We're ready for the next step," he says. "I think we'll be there soon." ▀



Manholes have proven to be prime candidates for Zebtron applications by PIC. Clockwise, from top left: steps are loose and corrosion is evident in this manhole; blasting reveals steel supporting the concrete walls; Joyce sprays Zebtron; the finished manhole.

even collect a salary the first nine months we were in business."

Joyce built a customized \$200,000 mobile rig — "a Cadillac," according to Elliott — for Zebtron polyurethane applications, which Joyce is finding particularly valuable in the infrastructure rehabilitation market. Pump stations, manholes, sludge tanks and clarifiers are all excellent candidates for applications of the 100 percent solids hybrid polyurethane coatings, which are distributed by Sherwin-Williams.

flooring applications. And custom-built generators run on propane and provide up to 200 amps of power, which might not be available to outside work crews in many manufacturing settings.

"They're self-contained, mobile, roll-around power plants, basically," Joyce says. "We pull up to a job and we can provide anything we need ourselves. We're entirely self-sufficient. A lot of time and thought has gone into the equipment we use."

Investing in training. PIC was