

Exclusive Interview
Beverly Thomas, President
Regional Contracting Services, LLC

1. Tell us what inspired you to create Regional Contracting Services?

The original Regional Contracting Services concept was crafted by someone other than me. Being unequally yoked and having completely different philosophies, we parted ways very quickly. And the rest is history.

2. What barriers did you have to overcome to achieve success in owning and running a construction company?

Initial barriers included establishing a line of credit with the bank, getting extended payment terms with suppliers and vendors, recruiting quality tradesmen, and securing our first bond. And as a woman of color, I'm often viewed as "the minority partner needed to check the boxes," but when we perform at the highest level, the barriers start to come down and Regional is viewed as a true strategic partner.

3. How did you augment your lack of traditional experience to be considered as a master builder in the industry?

I would NEVER consider myself a master builder in the industry. All the credit truly goes to the phenomenal tradesmen that work for Regional Contracting Services. However, to better understand how to manage and grow the firm, I went back to school and earned my MBA in business. Having an MBA was a game changer!

4. Tell me about one of Regional's most challenging projects.

One of the most challenging projects for Regional was working on WMATA's 16-station renovation. The project should have lasted 2 ½ years, but it took 5 ½ years. We had to work at night during non-revenue generating hours. Our crews would average 2 ½ to 3 hours of productivity each night. The authority was difficult, but our relationship with Clark Construction's civil team was a tremendous asset. After completing the project, we developed a great reputation as a qualified contractor to work on WMATA's other renovation projects with Kiewit Construction.

5. How are you dealing with working conditions, projects, general contractors and or owners under COVID-19 circumstances?

The current COVID-19 pandemic is scary and unnerving for everyone. As a company, we have implemented new safety standards and policies that are in the best interest of our employees. While some of our customers are not pleased with the changes, our philosophy remains "safety first," and that starts with our employees. We set up temperature checks for each employee daily at the job sites and record the data. We provide our tradesmen with disposable gloves, which are required to be worn under their work gloves. The tradesmen also wear disposable masks along with cloth masks that have pockets to insert coffee filters as an additional layer of protection. Each job site has a large supply of disinfectant wipes to continuously disinfect the tools. To avoid cross contamination, we do not allow our tradesmen to move from job to job (general contractors are not pleased). Keeping each team assigned to specific job sites helps to stop the spread of the virus.

6. How do you see the construction industry evolving during and after COVID-19?

I think small construction firms will have a very difficult time surviving. The death rate will continue to increase. These occurrences are causing the insurance companies to pay out claims they did not anticipate. That said, I believe they will start to charge higher premiums to firms based on the industry segment and employee occupations. Unfortunately, there also may be contract language that flows

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down all liability to the subcontractor regarding all issues related to COVID-19. As a result, this will cause many firms to leave the industry.

COVID-19 will continue to impact the world for an extended period. This information should be taken seriously. Understanding and following the advice of the healthcare professionals and doctors is wise. However, we also recognize the economic impact, so adjustments must be made. Therefore, we should anticipate construction schedules that are aggressive and extended workdays

We must find a balance between public health, economic growth, and ethical decision making; I believe this is possible.

7. Have you consulted mentors along the way, and if so, in what capacity?

Mentorship is critical to our success as a firm and to me personally. For the past 19 years, I've had several prime mentors including Hensel Phelps, regarding field operations, and MCN Build regarding industry segment work, aggressive summer schedules, and developing specificity in the market. To understand government reporting and requirements, my mentor was Balfour-Beatty. To learn the healthcare industry and its internal workings, my mentor was Turner Construction. My personal mentors are women who are first and foremost God centered. I need to always surround myself with people who are ethical, spiritually grounded, and who will hold me accountable BEFORE I lose my way. Currently, my personal mentor is Lisa Williams.

8. How important is it to have strong senior management staff (e.g. controller, safety officer, estimator, project managers, etc.)? Also, what about legal and accounting representation?

Your company infrastructure is critical to your success. Our team is talented, committed, driven, and focused. We are perfectionist and have controlling personalities. Our senior management team includes Fred, COO (16 years); Claudia, Contract Compliance (11 years); Gustavo, Superintendent (17 years); Melanie, Senior PM (9 years). Longevity only tells part of the story. Our philosophy is, "we eat out of the same pot," which essentially means Regional's success depends on everyone.

Our professional services team includes Craig, accountant; Dwight, insurance agent; Joe and Justin, bonding underwriters; and David, construction attorney. We have worked together since the beginning. They have helped me grow professionally and financially. The professional service team is the heartbeat of Regional.

9. Are you looking to expand to other areas within the construction field and why?

Our plan is to start expanding in additional scopes of work and offer more construction related products and services. It vitally important for Regional to expand our offerings because the general contractors are changing the way they procure projects. We do not want to stay one dimensional.

10. What do you do to unwind at the end of the day or week?

At the end of most days, I go home and cook for my husband and son. I love to cook and bake. At the end of the week, my unwinding includes jazz music. I love to sit in my sunroom with some "white grapes," and listen to music.