

# Steel Framing: a market on the move

## Growing acceptance of steel studs in construction offers new opportunities for contractors

**A**s a market, it is admittedly still in its infancy.

But for the wall and ceiling contractor looking for a bigger slice of the action in the construction market, steel stud framing may be the answer.

The virtues of metal lath and light gage framing are a proven fact. And now the nation's designers are displaying a growing acceptance of the use of steel studs for other cost-saving applications—steel stud load bearing structures and curtain wall construction.

With more and more projects going to steel stud framing, particularly in the residential and light commercial markets, and the readiness of wall and ceiling contractors to expand into steel applications, steel manufacturers are understandably enthusiastic about the emerging trend.

"The market really is unlimited," states Bill Baird, general sales manager for Alabama Metal Industries Corporation, of Birmingham. "There is no greater opportunity than right now to get into the structural stud system market."

Says Bill Tuttle, vice president of sales, The Bostwick Steel Lath Company, of Niles, Ohio: "The growth of steel stud framing is beginning to accelerate—and its acceptance will be greater and greater."

### A Best Buy

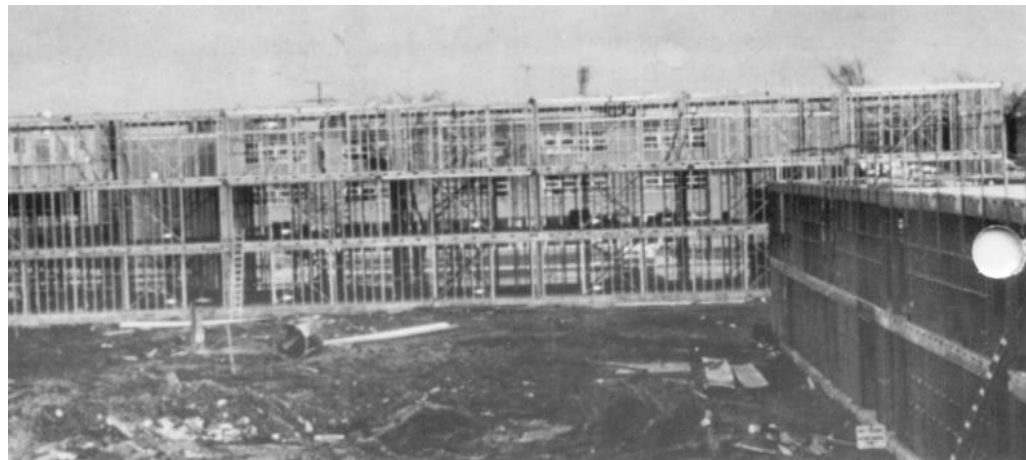
"The market is there to be developed," claims Bob Timbrook, product manager—lath/steel framing products, Wheeling Corrugating Company, a division of Wheeling-Pittsburgh Steel Corporation, Wheeling, W. Va., "and the manufacturers and contractors must work hand-in-hand to promote it."

Adds Bob Chizmar, manager of sales-marketing, Casings, of West Middlesex, Pa., "Steel framing represents one of the best buys in the industry right now, and a move into this market is a logical progression for the wall and ceiling contractors. They've been working with metal so they already know steel, its characteristics, its tolerances."

one quality contractor taking single responsibility for the entire system."

### Possess Skills

That the wall and ceiling contractor already possess the expertise was mentioned by Wheeling's Timbrook: "They have the craftsmen working for them right now, especially where they have been



U.S. Navy barracks buildings are typical of economical load bearing steel stud framed buildings. Each stud performs as a column, in addition to providing back-up for facings.

Since the major manufacturers have code approval on their products and feel confident that the level of support technology now enables them to offer serious competition to traditional wood studs, they are unanimous in their feeling that experienced wall and ceiling contractors hold the key to market success.

"In effect, the contractor can offer a systems approach," explains Tuttle. "With steel stud framing, he can offer the whole package—framing and the interior and exterior jobs as well."

"The framing contractors have mostly been doing it," points out Baird, "and then subbing out the finishing work. But the wall and ceiling contractors can do it all, and thus provide the owner with

putting up curtain wall. It's a relatively simple step to use the men they have and thus expand their work."

The factors making steel stud framing competitive include the narrowing between wood and steel prices, speed of erection, the options of on-site or off-site fabrication, along with the availability and versatility of steel.

"When you design for a steel stud system," emphasizes Tuttle, "the cost savings is there. First, you no longer need as much foundation to carry the weight of a steel system as you would need with conventional materials—and there's the material savings, too."

Not only can an architect design greater spans because of the

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strength of steel, but once the structural frame is in position the assembly can be quickly enclosed. This, of course, allows interior work to begin immediately without regard to weather conditions.

Add to this the cost advantages of pre-punched holes for wiring and conduit, the potential insurance savings because of steel's non-combustibility, steel framing's accommodation of virtually any type of exterior finishing, and such life-cycle items as not being sensitive to termites, dryrot or varying climatic conditions, and the potential brightens considerably.

For contractors wanting to take a serious look at steel stud load bearing applications, most industry experts feel the best opportunities lie in the residential area's low rise apartment work and in the light commercial-industrial market, i.e., gasoline stations, fast food restaurants, nursing homes, small medical and office buildings, mini warehouses, and the like.

Nor is entry into the market that difficult. Where the architect has designed for a steel framing job, the contractor can bid the entire job. Where the project has been designed with other materials, a contractor can cooperate with a supplier or manufacturer on working out an alternative design.

### Can Sell Product

And, finally, the contractor can learn the product so well that he can match up his product knowledge with a customer's needs and actually sell a steel framing job.

"With steel framing," Baird says, "there is no need for buildings to look alike. When the owner claims he wants a different kind of building, steel framing can do it- and the wall and ceiling contractor can do the whole thing."

That this is completely within the realm of possibility can be found in the experiences of iaWCC contractor Jim Brunemann, of R.B. Brunemann & Sons, Inc., Cincinnati, Ohio. One of the original proponents of steel studs, both curtain wall and load bearing structures, Jim's firm has been actively involved in the market for

more than six years. Just recently, he sold as a package a Kentucky school job where "all they had to do was put the slab down."

Brunemann & Sons is doing the load bearing walls, bar joists, decking, drywall, acoustical ceilings, painting, flooring and, as Jim says, "we're looking at the roofing. We just might do that, too."

The first load bearing job his firm took was a 200-unit motel which was completed in only six and a half weeks. And to hone down his management control edge, he took video tapes of the job for time study and problem review purposes, a practice he continues today.

### Plant on Wheels

Brunemann & Sons boasts a manufacturing plant on wheels for on-site pre-fabbing of load bearing walls, floors, and mansard roofs. When a skin is applied, the pre-fabbing is done in the shop and then taken to the site and erected.



Steel stud and joist framing were preferred over wood on this apartment complex because of improved quality, increased speed of construction and reduced insurance costs.

A firm believer in pre-fabrication, Jim feels that the greatest danger for a contractor breaking into the steel stud market is the lack of pre-planning. "The danger point, I think, is in the lack of pre-planning and a contractor has to be very careful about it.

"You need to know your components and also the sequence of moves so they won't create a conflict not only with yourself but

with the other trades. You lose all your advantage when skilled craftsmen are standing around waiting."

Former iaWCC president, George Brueggeman, of Tobin & Rooney, Inc., Houston, Texas, got into the structural stud business some five years ago, specializing in curtain wall.

Lately, he has been looking at the steel stud load bearing structure as another possibility.

"The market for steel is there," George says, "and we bid every job we can find in structural studs.

"For a contractor taking a first look, I can only express my own feeling that there isn't much more involved in structural studs than in the lathing-just a heavier type of material and some welding. And most lathers here in Texas are pretty good welders."

Not only does George's firm bid every structural steel job it can find, but makes a strong effort to convince the architect who has specified a conventional wall to switch over to steel stud and possibly save money.

In this, he works closely with his local promotional bureau. But he feels the contractor has a strong stake in the selling job. "You must promote the materials and systems you'll be using," he advises.

"And when it comes to architects and owners, we've been providing them with marketing and technical assistance for a number of years, so the market is aware of the benefits of load bearing steel studs for low-rise construction," according to Don Schroeder, Framing Systems Manager for the Milcor division of Inryco, Inc., Milwaukee, Wis.

### Awareness is up

Because the steel framing market has begun to improve only in the last 5-6 years, there are no hard and fast projections as to its dollar volume nationally. But the increasing awareness now by architects of its advantages, plus the heightened level of development by the industry, all augur well for a bright future.

And to the enterprising contractor wary of stepping into new, unfamiliar ventures., most of the

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