This Denver Drywall Contractor Achieves Success By Making Every Segment of His Business Provide a Maximum Contribution

Last Minute Development!

Vernon L. Raymer, who heads Delta Drywall, Inc., of Denver, Colo., has been elected to the iaWCC/GDCI Executive Committee.

His election as association secretary came at the annual business meeting of the iaWCC/GDCI Board of Directors during the iaWCC/GDCI annual convention and exposition at the Hyatt Regency Hotel, in New Orleans.

Raymer thus becomes the first new iaWCC/GDCI officer elected by the joint Board of Directors. He succeeds Robert Watkins, Fort Lauderdale, Fla., who becomes association Treasurer.

The complete story of the annual elections will be included in the April edition of Construction Dimensions Magazine.

While they’ve never really said as much a lot of wall and ceiling contractors in the Colorado area would be a mite happier with their business lives if Vernon L. Raymer would settle down to a liking for the usual gloop to be found daily on the television tube.

The truth of the matter is: Vern Raymer, 52-year-old executive of Delta Drywall, Inc., 2605 West 7th avenue, Denver, can’t stand television. So, he diversifies his free time by pursuing his hobby of drag racing.

Ordinarily, this wouldn’t be expected to create anxiety in other construction firms. But Vern, who is as quick as any other drag racer when it comes to “putting a hole shot” on the competition—that’s grabbing a fractional time advantage by anticipating the light change to green—unfortunately tends to carry over his emphasis for the tiniest increment into his construction business.

That makes the $2 million a year Delta Drywall firm a rather formidable opponent when Vern and his partners, Jim Raniere, Brent Funk, and Ross Plowman, begin homing in on a job their company wants. Delta is a diversified drywall firm, specializing in demountable partitions, grid ceilings, insulation, steel framing, and load bearing steel jobs.

That it runs about as efficiently as can be expected of a construction company is quickly obvious. Headquartered in an attractive two-story precast concrete structure, it features some 11,000 square feet of warehouse space and a second-floor executive suite of offices that takes up 3,000 square feet.

Each of the office areas is finished in a different drywall technique. Another 17,000 square feet of the building is leased out. Each available square foot of the headquarters building is utilized for maximum contribution. Materials are carefully and efficiently arranged in racks.
Reaching For the Edge

along the walls of the expansive warehousing area with lengths spray painted on such items as steel stud- ning so an immediate and accurate visual inventory can be made.

Floors are kept clean—they appear scrubbed—and the vehicle repair area would do honors to a showroom exhibit. Additionally, each of the major sections in the warehouse is segmented to hold materials and supplies for individual applications.

To someone like Vern Raymer the fact that Delta headquarters and mode of operation is as lean, efficient, and clean as the fuel mix on the 1,200 hp engine that powers his rail dragster is simply an extension of the way he does things.

Delta personnel show little concern for executive titles, preferring instead to operate on functions to maximize flexibility; Delta is diversifying but at its own pace and not at the pace of the industry; everyone is accustomed to working the hours necessary to keep the company growing.

A native of Lincoln, Nebraska, Vern is the son of John and Mary Schneider Raymer, both of whom live in Denver where they moved when Vern was a 14-year-old. Following high school graduation in Denver, Vern moved into construction as a lather but left the trades during World War II to find employment in a munitions plant, then with a crane manufacturing company.

He also worked as a district circulation manager for a newspaper, drove a taxi and then a dump truck before returning to lathing work in 1946.

Married to the former Beverly Rogers Raymer, of Denver, Vern is the father of one daughter, Karen Toops, who lives with her Air Force Captain husband in Dayton, Ohio, and a son, Brian, 25, who is a steel framing foreman for Delta and who also drives nowadays in the Raymer dragster.

As for his racing hobby, Vern has been at it since the late 40s, competing in the Pro-Comp Division where a ¼-mile stretch is covered in less than 7.5 seconds. All told, he has some $35 thousand invested in his car and equipment.

A secretary of the Gypsum Drywall Contractors International prior to consolidation, Vern served as a director at the first combined Board meeting of iaWCC/GDCI. He is also active in the Colorado Subcontractors Association and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

No stranger to the 16-hour day, Vern stillfound time to sit down with CONSTRUCTION DIMENSIONS and talk about Delta Drywall, his industry, and how he feels about it.

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RAYMER:

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DIMENSIONS: Vern, the first impression of your offices, the warehouses, and the appearance of your company’s inventory and equipment is that it is the neatest, cleanest operation around. Is it always this well kept?

RAYMER: Thank you for the compliment, and the answer is, “yes,” it is always this well kept. We never have been able to go along with a haphazard, dirty warehouse. It just doesn’t take that much to keep it organized and clean—and it pays off in dollars in the end, too.

DIMENSIONS: It appears that all materials in the bins and racks are not only segregated by type but also by size and the like?

RAYMER: That’s correct. As you can see, material storage is carefully planned. Each pallet of material is also coded with a spray gun so you can walk past the bins and find what you’re looking for; in short, you can see it. At the same time, we can make a quick check of our inventory levels.

DIMENSIONS: Many, perhaps most, contractors use a paper system for inventory control with a visual inspection as a support.

RAYMER: And we do the opposite. We, of course, checked out a paper inventory control system—and we do use a system—but we still preferred to keep it open and visual. By emphasizing the natural, visual system we feel we get better control—and certainly much more flexibility.

DIMENSIONS: How about control over equipment and tools such as screw guns, screws, drills, and other easily lost items?

RAYMER: We’ve set up a pegboard system for these items. It’s visual—and again it’s backed up with a paper system. With the use of the peg board we can determine what equipment is being used by an employee on any given job site—and we can determine this almost immediately.

A daily running inventory is kept on the large peg board and we color code the paperwork according to material. For example, we use yellow forms for steel, white ones for finishes, and pink for sheetrock.

DIMENSIONS: In view of the careful planning your company does, do you ever feel that too much planning can get in the way of actually doing the job?

RAYMER: Planning is natural with all of us and we try to be as accurate as we can be with everything. Certainly, we have to allow for error—but it should be a small margin of error for us—and for anyone else.

DIMENSIONS: In these times of somewhat depressed business conditions, it’s harder than ever to keep the error margin small, isn’t it?

RAYMER: Well, business opportunities are fewer and the whole industry is becoming more complex. Consequently, I think you’ll find a washout of contractors—generals and subs—in the next few years. It’s already been happening in the Denver area for the past two years and you’ll see more of it because I think only the fittest will survive the tight construction market ahead.

DIMENSIONS: Then you aren’t looking forward to a quick comeback?

RAYMER: I don’t know many contractors who are looking for a quick comeback. Furthermore, I don’t think we’ll ever see the conditions of ’72 and ’73 again.

There will be more public buildings, but schools have been overbuilt across the country and it’ll take time to absorb all the office building space that is now available. And many of the new office buildings going up are being built outside of town. That means more traveling.

DIMENSIONS: Aside from the predicted washout, what do you see as the proper response for specialty contractors?

RAYMER: Oh, I think we’ll all be bidding more. We’re experiencing this now. There are many days when all of us—my partners and myself—are back in the estimating room at the same time.

DIMENSIONS: What do you see ahead? Will it still be primarily a bidding market or one that will require contractors to do some ‘birddogging and negotiating?’

RAYMER: I don’t think any reasonable distinction can be made right now. With us anyway, there’s no fast rule on how we approach or obtain a job. Whether it’s bidding
or negotiating, so much depends on the job.

The big problem right now is any job at all. Just look at the new Johns-Manville world headquarters situation here and you have a pretty good answer. J-M’s headquarters building is just about completed and all of the office area for all the departments around Denver will be moving into that new building.

This will vacate some 400,000 square feet of space in the next year.

That much space will take some time to fill up and in the meantime the buildings that are on the boards now won’t be built right away. You’ll get a few high-rent, prestige types of places, but the general office building market in Denver should be depressed for some time to come.

DIMENSIONS: If business conditions appear somewhat gloomy—not "I think diversification . . . should be rational, planned diversification— not a panic response.”

just in Denver but across the country for the most part—do you see diversification as an effective response?

RAYMER: I think diversification is an effective response under any conditions. But it should be rational, planned diversification, not a panic response. We have been, and are diversifying because we’re growing. But we’ll diversify at our pace—not the pace of the industry.

Right now Delta can take a job from the slab up. If the shell is up we can now do the entire interior.

DIMENSIONS: Everyone talks the game of change, Vern. What’s your feeling about new procedures and even tools?

RAYMER: If there’s a new tool that represents a potential savings, we’ll use it. It’s really as simple as that. The same goes with a procedure.

The real key in something new, though, is your people. If they won’t use, say, a new tool up to its capabilities, you aren’t really achieving efficiency. You must first convince the foreman because he’s the key to the workforce and if you haven’t convinced him then he won’t convince anyone else.

DIMENSIONS: Speaking of convincing, your company logo is quite attractive and there is a very attractive brochure on your desk. Do you feel self-promotion will be even more important in the period coming up?

RAYMER: Self-promotion is important anytime. The only one who’s going to blow our whistle for us is us. So we aimed for a distinctive, immediately recognizable logo. And the brochure with its multi-colored sheets that feature colorful graphics on drywall installations, sound baffles, textures, designs and the like was designed by a professional designer. We obviously want to create a good impression—and we want some control over that impression.

DIMENSIONS: How did the name Delta come about?

RAYMER: Well, it’s the third letter of the Greek alphabet; it’s where several rivers converge—and three of us converged to form this company. That’s only a rough interpretation, but that’s it nevertheless.

DIMENSIONS: From a teen-ager working as a lather for a friend of the family to head of a large construction firm, what is it that you see as the major change in the industry?

RAYMER: Well, I’d have to say complexity. There have been, of course, many changes in equipment and materials—the technology of it all—but the biggest change has been the complexity.

DIMENSIONS: Not at all like adjusting a fine racing engine, is it?

RAYMER: No, but then if there were no problems or challenges there’d be no need for me either.

That’s why I enjoy my hobby of drag racing so much. I love to take a wrench and put it together.

And—I must admit—it’s the complexity of the thing that I like.