Service is a Premium

In California, Valdez Taylor Puts Emphasis on the Personal Touch

It pays to give pleasant, patient customer service — and California’s Valdez A. Taylor has a $3-million painting and drywall business to prove the point.

Ever since he came to Goleta, a coastal town a few miles north of Los Angeles, the 54-year-old Louisiana-born contractor has been providing a goodly proportion of many things. And over the years, it’s all combined with a deserved reputation for soft-spoken integrity that has consistently spelled success.

“It doesn’t take all that much time and effort to be nice to people,” Val admits, “and it pays off personally and well from a business standpoint, too.”

Born in New Orleans, son of the late Lauet and Laura Haynes Taylor, Val moved with his family to California in 1954. He had finished school in New Orleans, and went to work for his general contractorfather as a carpenter.

Carpenter is a bit narrow for describing his duties for his father which included not only a full journeyman status at the end of his apprenticeship, but some management, estimating, and an enriching dip into the niceties of other construction trades as needed.

Once he came to California, moving first into the Pomona area, Val went to work for a painting contractor. Later he worked a three-years spell with a painting and drywall contractor, ending up as a supervisor.

When the contractor, Serles, moved out of the Santa Barbara area, Val saw his chance to go into business for himself and took the leap.

From the beginning, Val’s Painting & Drywall, Inc., was an industrial-commercial contractor who also did a large amount of business in the residential/development market.

“The whole idea from the start was to be big enough to do the major jobs,” he explains, “but still keep a capability for serving small jobs. That has paid off now that conservation and moratoriums are so prevalent in California.

“Some contractors only want the big job, but I believe that you should take the small job — and service people. Much of the new construction is now gone in this area and we find that much more of our work is modernization, remodeling, and similar such small, fix-up type work.”

Val’s Painting & Drywall is a multi-service company which specializes in drywall, painting, metal studs, demountable/movable partitions, and carpeting.

A member of the iaWCC/GDCI Board of Directors, Val has long been a supporter of his industry, taking an active and highly influential role in the affairs of the local drywall contractor associations.

Married to the former Lorine Cousins, a native of Slidell, Louisiana, Val and his wife are the parents of a

Continued on next page
son, Randy, who works for his father, and four daughters: Roxanne, Pamela, Colleen, and Sherie Ann.

When CONSTRUCTION DIMENSIONS caught up to the tall bespectacled contractor he was in the midst of figuring a number of jobs, working as many, and wondering if the phone would stop ringing. Even thus, he found time to sit down and talk about painting and drywall work and some of the challenges that he encounters.

DIMENSIONS: Val, not all that many wall and ceiling contractors get into painting. They usually sub it out. Do you find it profitable enough to recommend it to a diversified-minded contractor?

TAYLOR: Well, I definitely think that the painting has helped us. We usually get both the painting and the drywall on a job, but sometimes we have to settle for just one and getting half the cake is better than none, isn’t it?

DIMENSIONS: It also allows you to bid the system or the package, doesn’t it?

TAYLOR: Sure — and that’s an important point. You can have headaches when you do the drywall and not the painting. For instance, the drywall contractor thinks the painter should do the sanding and vice versa.

It’s easier for me to sand rather than wait for a drywall man, and this is especially advantageous in finishing work when you’re trying to complete a long punch list.

DIMENSIONS: How should a contractor go about the process of adding painting to his services?

TAYLOR: I think he should pretty much follow the procedure for getting into any other service learn more about it, learn all you can before you take the plunge.

Then he should get a good production man to work for him, one who knows quite a lot about painting, how to do it, how to bid it — and then start small so he can iron out wrinkles without taking any big losses.

Without someone who knows how much a painter should do in a day you can get hurt. And you’ll learn about productivity through the person you hire for that job.

DIMENSIONS: What are the disadvantages of painting as a construction service?

TAYLOR: I think you have to be prepared to spend more time on customer service. Everyone is color conscious and it’s visible. Drywall, of course, gets covered so customers aren’t nearly as critical.

Then when you go over colors with a builder or a homeowner, you have to put down some ground rules. I put “onecolor throughout” on all my estimates so customers will know that if they change colors they’ll have to pay at least $50 for each change. They want all these different colors but they are reluctant to pay the extra cost of clean up, buying different color and cost of paints, etc.

DIMENSIONS: Working with speculative builders can sometimes present collection problems. How do you approach the payment end of the business?

TAYLOR: I really have very little trouble. I’ve had friends tell me to avoid certain contractors and builders, that they’ll break you. The truth of the matter was, everything worked out fine.
DIMENSIONS: It’s been said by contractors that losing your lien rights is the one unforgivable sin?
TAYLOR: There are a lot of unforgivable sins in contracting, but that is one of them, for sure. Here in California you have 30 days after notice of completion is filed, but most contracts call for 35 days after notice — and you can lose your lien rights with that kind of a contract if you go along with it.

DIMENSIONS: With conservation and moratoriums pinching the rate of construction, do you find yourself traveling more these days?
TAYLOR: There has been some increase in this kind of thing, but I usually do it only with contractors or builders that I have worked for in the past. There is the extra cost to go out of town to San Diego, Bakersfield, or the like.

The builder may be paying you slightly more or the same as he would pay locally, but you have greater costs doing this, flying around to check work, to meet and provide personal service. These items can add up and you must keep a careful watch.

DIMENSIONS: You’re a union contractor. Does working with different locals present any problems?
TAYLOR: On a new job they’ll hassle you a bit. But once the business agent determines that you’re fair and reasonable to deal with that sort of thing stops. Actually, I’ve often gotten better workmen in new areas.

DIMENSIONS: The open shop movement has attracted a great deal of attention in California. Is it growing all that fast here?
TAYLOR: The biggest growth is north of here . . . Santa Maria, Fresno, Sacramento, and a number of good sized contractors have dropped out of the unions. Open shop is getting bigger and will continue to grow, I think.

DIMENSIONS: As you see it, Val, where is the greatest danger today for a wall and ceiling contractor?
TAYLOR: I would say it has to be in the fluctuation of material costs. And then, of course, there is the slower pace of work, the falling off in productivity, with overhead costs remaining the same.

Once upon a time a painter would paint one house’s walls with a brush, but today it seems if a man does one house with a roller he feels he’s put in an outstanding day’s work even though labor wages are much higher.

DIMENSIONS: Where do you see the biggest changes having already occurred and where might any new innovations be introduced?
TAYLOR: The change from plastered walls to drywall is a major change. And in painting, I’d have to say that the change — years ago now — of most importance was the switch from oil based to acrylic paints.

The latter types hold up better and retain their colors better and longer on exteriors. As for the future, I really don’t see any radical changes in the next couple of years.

DIMENSIONS: Some of the adhesive manufacturers are claiming new breakthroughs and suggest that adhesives will replace the standard drywall screw or nail.
TAYLOR: Well, adhesives certainly have a place in construction technology, but I don’t see them taking over from screws or nails.

It simply takes longer to glue materials onto studs. You bang in a nail or a screw and it’s finished; you don’t have to wait a few moments for anything to set up.

Then a mechanic’s hands get messy from glue and this messes up the board. In the winter or rainy season, the studs get damp and fastening becomes a problem.

DIMENSIONS: As a final question, Val, why do you belong to an association? So many contractors in this industry remain outside that there must be some reason?
TAYLOR: I don’t know about the others, of course, but in my own case I feel that I must keep closer tabs on what’s going on in the industry, maintain closer liaison with unions and management, and get the help and answers I might need from other contractors in the association.

It’s a good business . . . it’s been good to me . . . and I want to be a part of it. You do that with an association.