The city of Escondido’s new Center for the Arts was designed to be a showcase for artistic works, and as such, the facilities had to meet strict requirements for aesthetics, acoustics, lighting, etc. In other words, the buildings had to look and perform as beautifully as the artists’ works that were performed, displayed and/or created there.

The project was large and complex, involving some 22 separate contracts awarded by the city. Five separate buildings were constructed on the site: the professional Lyric Theatre, which seats 1,500, valued at $28 million; the community theater seating 400, valued at $10 million; a conference center, valued at $5 million; an art center with one wing housing artists’ studios and a second wing housing art galleries and a library, valued at $5 million; and a central plant/maintenance building, also valued at $5 million.

According to Sam McCuskey, project director for General Contractor Robert E. McKee Construction, these were the values at the time of

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partnering mean in the real world with real contractors?

According to Scott Brady, the Escondido project turned out to be his company’s “best and most successful example of true partnering. On this job, we were able to accomplish close to that ideal definition. It’s the first one where we’ve done this well.”

In Search of Partnering Excellence names the three key elements of a successful partnering relationship: trust, long-term commitment and shared vision. All three elements were evident on the Escondido project.

Brady described how the many players achieved a shared vision. “Because the job started while our company was undergoing some structural and organizational changes, we came up with a mission statement for the project,” Brady explained. “Every E. F. Brady Company employee signed it.”

But the commitment to the Brady Company mission statement for the project did not stop there. “Our company mission statement and set of values are printed on laminated cards. Jerry Bell, our project manager, carried one of those cards in his pocket every day. He was so successful at combing our values and making them mutually understood on the same project that the city of Escondido and McKee all accepted and committed to the same set of values.”

“The key people of McKee saw it and signed on to it and so did the city—the mayor, councilwoman and the owner’s reps. That further cemented the relationship,” Brady said.

“Jerry Chappel, the city’s rep, carried one of our cards on the project. When we negotiated change orders, those cards would come out on the desk. Any time a line of contention came up, the guys would look at the values and then look at each other,” Brady said. “They took them seriously.”

“We’re proud of how success-

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bid; final values will reflect an increase factor of 10 percent to 15 percent.

Construction labor peaked at approximately 350; McKee’s staff peaked at 18 people to manage the construction; E. F. Brady Company, Inc./San Diego, who won the subcontracts for fireproofing, lathing, plastering and drywall, had 128 people on the project at their highest labor point.

While substantial completion dates for each building varied, most of the construction was finished over the summer. The Lyric, for example, was to be completed by Aug. 1 and site work by mid-August. A stringent commissioning process followed the substantial completion of each building.

McCuskey described the commissioning process. “The owner’s theater consultants and acousticians will make sure that the speakers and the systems all work properly, test the rigging, stage lifts, etc. They essentially perform sound tests to check for rebound, outside noise, and fine tune the theaters so that the acoustics are what they want.”

McCuskey readily recommended acceptance of the Brady Company’s bids. “Brady is very responsible, very reputable,” McCuskey said. “We’ve always enjoyed a good working relationship with Brady and certainly look forward to working with them again on future projects.”

E. F. Brady Company, Inc. is a subsidiary of The Brady Companies, Ronald P. Brady, President. In 1946, E. F. Brady founded the company in San Diego.

Scott Brady, grandson of E. F. Brady, started at the San Diego office in 1977, leaving for several years to attend the University of Colorado-Boulder. After graduation in 1988, he returned to San Diego.

**Venetian Plaster Finish**

One of the special aesthetic requirements for the Lyric Theatre was an unusual Venetian plaster finish intended to give the interior an antique look.

The muted plaster colors of the Venetian finish don’t dry to a single, consistent color. Instead, the light areas of the finish are bone color with subtle yellow undertones, while the dark areas are a brown sandstone. After the finish dries, two coats of furniture polish were spread on with rags, then polished with orbital buffers. “The polish really highlights the finish,” Brady remarked.

To get the right finish, Brady Company made several mock-ups. “When we had what we thought was wanted, we approached the architect,” Brady said.

Sam McCuskey added, “The venetian finish is beautiful and very specialized. Not many contractors could do it.”

“Brady Company opened up some opportunities for themselves because they were able to do so many of the special items,” McCuskey said. “This included not only the ornate plaster but also the indoor and outdoor plaster, the drywall: steel framing and the GFRG installation.”

**Creating the Right Performance Environment**

The “acoustical requirements were very unique,” McCuskey said. “Theaters have requirements that make them very difficult to construct. The acousticians worried about sound transmission from the plumbing in the restrooms, about air coming through the diffusers. This made the work very challenging for Brady, since they built the walls.”

Brady Company did all the interior steel work, including many walls requiring shaft liners. McCuskey added, “There were just some construction requirements that you don’t see in most buildings. They were there to see that unwanted noise would not be transferred into the auditorium.”

Scott Brady explained, “All the plasterwork had to be two inches thick to get a density that was proper for the acoustician, which is a difficult process. The walls

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ful we were in letting our values and our specific mission for that job be understood and lived by every employee that worked on the job for us. We hadn’t done this before.”

According to McCuskey, the “team building” idea works well “with those who really believe in it and buy into it. There are, of course, the contractors and architects and owners that only give it lip service, but they don’t really follow through with the philosophy.”

“I’ve seen it fail, and I’ve seen it be very successful,” McCuskey continued. “It’s only as good as the people who subscribe to it. If they fulfill their commitments, it will work.”

“That’s where Brady Company is such an excellent partner. They fulfill their commitment. They motivate other contractors, setting an incredible example of what a good partner is and the ideals that are expected. As construction managers on the project, we were able to point to the Brady Company and say, ‘Look at the good relationship
we have with Brady and the relation-
ship they have with the owner
and the architect.”

McCuskey continued, “Other contractors would see the Brady Company and be motivated by
their example. Their philosophy
rubbed off on the subcontractors
working around them.”

McCuskey added, “We talked about commitment, but Brady also
created trust. When they say
they’re going to do something,
they do it. We’ve had them per-
form change order work when we
didn’t have time to negotiate a
price with them. They knew they
would be treated fairly by the
owner. They knew they’d be paid.”

“I’ve never seen such an accu-
rate accounting of time and mate-
rials. Brady never tried to gouge
anybody. And even if they made
the mistake while they were per-
forming a change order, they
wouldn’t charge for the time. They
felt that if they made a mistake,
that was on them. They really de-
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and fronts of the balconies and
the whole ceiling (which is huge!) have two-inch-thick plas-
ter. To our knowledge, our com-
pany has never done a two-inch-
thick ceiling, even though we
specialize in plastering and have
been in business since 1946.”

The plaster application included a
hand-tied layer of lath, followed by a
scratch and brown coat of plaster. A
pencil rod was used to fur out past
the first layer, and a second layer of
lath was hand-tied on the pencil rod.
Finally, a second scratch and brown
cake with finish were added.”

**CREATIVE PROBLEM SOLVING**

Sometimes design details simply
did not work in the field. This is a
common problem on large, compli-
cated projects like the Escondido
Center for the Arts.

McCuskey praised the Brady
Company’s ability to propose “field
fixes” for such glitches. “When the
design doesn’t work or there’s a con-
flict between the desires of the archi-
tect and the acoustician, you’ve got
to satisfy both. You can go to senior
people at Brady and say, ‘Here’s our
problem.’ Every single time, they
knew how to solve the problem.
They came up with solutions that
would satisfy the architect, acousti-
cian, owner and the construction
manager.”

McCuskey described an example.
“A wall was called for to be four
inches thick with drywall. If we built
the wall as shown on the drawings,
there was not enough room for ac-
cess on one side or for the acoustical
curtain on the other side. We were
all scratching our heads.”

“Brady came up with a unique so-
lution. Instead of drywall, they put a
two-inch-thick plaster wall, which
gave access to the wall, though very
tight and confined. Brady made it
work so that everyone was happy.
Everyone walked away saying
‘That’s a great fix, in fact, probably
better than it was originally de-
sign .’”

“We can’t spend weeks trying to
come up with a fix,” McCuskey added. “Any time there was a problem, Brady came up with a solution, usually within a couple of hours. At the same time, they had to satisfy the owner’s concern about budget. They couldn’t spend a lot of money to solve the problem. Their solution was cost-effective, stayed on schedule, aesthetically pleasing to the architect and met the acoustician’s requirements.”

McCuskey said: “I think Brady was able to do this because of their company philosophy. It’s the “can do” attitude. Framers, tapers, drywallers—no matter what part of the Brady Company worked for, all had the attitude that they could do it. They wanted to see satisfied clients. They’re just a very strong team player.”

About the Author
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