

Adapting for Success



What does it take to rise to the top of the masonry industry
- and then maintain that position?

“**T**he area that has always set our company apart from others is the ability to adjust,” said Robert V. “Buddie” Barnes Jr., president and CEO of Dee Brown Inc. (DBI), Dallas. “We are constantly cross-training our people and can do cast stone, cut stone, masonry, brick panels, stone panels, thinset stone work, and architectural precast. If you can hang it or lay it, we can do it. We are not afraid to tackle the unusual or difficult project.”

Although the company performs many types of masonry work, panelized brick

and stone could be considered a specialty. “Panelization gives us the flexibility to be working on the masonry while the structure is going up,” stated Barnes. “The project goes much faster, saving time and interim financing.”

Brick panels usually are built in the yard and trucked to the jobsite, but sometimes – as with the American Airlines Center in Dallas – they are fabricated onsite. Stone panels are plant-fabricated and then trucked to the jobsite. In a Chicago project, for example, DBI rented a steel mill with overhead cranes to make the panels. For another Chicago high-rise, 18,000 to 25,000-pound architectural precast pieces were shipped from Florida to

be erected onsite.

The company readily adjusts its corporate structure by forming new divisions and alliances to capture changing markets (see the “DBI Timeline” sidebar on page 28). In 1989, for example, DBI expanded westward by joining forces with Los Angeles-based Hatch Masonry Inc. When owner Bob Hatch retired in 1992, DBI bought out his interest and continues to operate DBM/Hatch as a wholly-owned subsidiary licensed to do business in California and Hawaii.

More recently, DBI established a partnership with Kepco+Inc., a panel manufacturer and stone erector in Salt Lake City. The two companies teamed up to

build the 24-story, 775-room, granite-clad Grand America Hotel, which served as headquarters for the 2002 Winter Olympics. Kepco+DBI LLC currently is working on the Utah capitol preservation project and soon will start the Clear Creek Monastery in Oklahoma (see the “Project Portfolio” sidebar on page 28).

When Barnes joined DBI in 1969 as an estimator, the company was logging between \$4 and \$6 million a year – already a very large masonry contractor. As business soared during the 1970s, Barnes took the lead in integrating computer technology into the operations. Brown gradually handed over the reins to Barnes, who was named president and COO in 1990. Throughout the 1990s, DBI consistently placed among the country’s top five masonry contractors, and last year completed \$46.2 million of work and ranked #4 in MASONRY CONSTRUCTION magazine’s 2002 listing of the country’s top contractors.

The key to maintaining financial strength, according to Barnes, is “capitalize the

company and keep it capitalized.” He expressed concern about many masonry contractors’ failure to put money back into their businesses to fund growth.

“These businesses withdraw the money at the end of each year personally and then, faced with a bad job or lack of work, can’t weather the storm,” he continued. “The mortality rate with masonry contractors is among the highest in the construction industry. If you don’t have cash (net worth), you don’t have bonding and without that you won’t get the big projects.” DBI has had more than \$250 million bonded at any given time, and was one of only two contractors able to bond the J. Paul Getty Museum, a \$66.2 million stone contract.

Barnes also is concerned that contractors aren’t training enough qualified

workers for future needs. While DBI has 26 apprentices taking a two-year masonry program offered through the Construction Education Foundation at the local community college, others have enrolled just a handful of students. “When the students finish that program, they still need to spend another two years on the job learning the more difficult aspects of stone, rock, brick, and precast,” said Barnes. “There are not enough people doing the



Left: The Crescent Center in downtown Dallas spans two city blocks and is the national's third largest limestone structure.

Right: Robert V. “Buddy” Barnes Jr. believes that capitalization is the key to a masonry contractor’s financial strength.

Project Portfolio

“With a lot of careers you can’t look back and physically see what you have accomplished,” observed Barnes. “But I can look around at the skylines of Dallas, Houston, or Austin; in Atlanta, Chicago, or Boston; or even on the side of a mountain in Jackson Hole, Wyo. and see something that my company has done.”

The following list is just a sampling of the diverse projects DBI has tackled or currently has on the board.

DOWNTOWN DALLAS

DBI masons have shaped the 17-block Dallas Arts District, a collage of many significant structures. Morton H. Meyerson Symphony Hall, a concrete-reinforced masonry building designed by world-renowned architect I.M. Pei, is clad in Indiana limestone. The interior uses limestone, travertine, and marble from the Philippines. The Dallas Museum of Art also sports Indiana limestone inside and out. The Trammell Crow Center (office tower) and the Trammell & Margaret Crow

Collection of Asian Art (adjacent exhibit pavilion) feature an all-granite exterior and marble interior. DBI currently is putting the finishing touches on the Nasher Sculpture Center’s two-acre sculpture garden, which is a landscape of natural settings enclosed in travertine walls and traversed by stone walkways.

At the north end of the Arts District stands the nation’s third largest limestone structure – the Crescent Court – a two-block complex comprised of three office buildings, a hotel, and retail space. Another office facility – the 19-story 2100 McKinney building – was named MASONRY CONSTRUCTION magazine’s “Best High-Rise Building” in 1999. The nearby Federal Reserve Bank displays a granite-based limestone façade accented with architectural precast.

Not far from Meyerson Hall is historic Cathedral Guadalupe, where DBI did some award-winning interior stonework. When the brick cathedral was constructed in the 1800s, the bell tower was not built to

its full designed height. A restoration is planned in which DBI will extend the existing bell tower up to 100-foot high.

J. PAUL GETTY MUSEUM, LOS ANGELES

Barnes described the J. Paul Getty Museum, completed in 1999, as a “once in a lifetime” project. DBI installed 1 million square feet of Italian travertine cut parallel to the stone’s layers to produce a rough surface revealing fossils embedded deep in the natural stone. A typical travertine block measured 30" x 30" x 3" and weighed 280 pounds. The non-loadbearing stone panels of the museum’s facades were left ungrouted, which enabled moisture to escape easily and allowed the stone to move during earthquakes.

MIAMI INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

The crafting of two art walls for Miami International Airport is the latest of several projects DBI has done with artist Brad Goldberg. Five stories high and 30-feet

training. It will take the active participation of many more of our contractors to sustain the growth of the industry.”

When he’s not running DBI, Barnes dedicates his time to the industry and his community. He serves as state chairman for the Mason Contractors Association of America, and on the boards of three local industry groups: the Texas Masonry Council, the United Masonry Contractors Dallas/Fort Worth, and Quoin, the Northern Texas Chapter of Associated General Contractors.


Barnes also contributes his management and construction expertise to various community organizations. He is active in the nonprofit Salesmanship Club of Dallas, which stages the nation’s largest fundraising golf tournament, which benefits underprivileged children. He serves on the board and chairs the camping facilities committee for the Boy Scouts Circle Ten Council, and chairs the architectural and construction committee of the Dallas Arboretum and Botanical Gardens, where he also serves on the board and executive committee. Barnes is board chairman of the Baylor Institute for Rehabilitation and a board member of the Baylor Healthcare System Foundation.

DBI Timeline

- 1955** Barnes’ father-in-law, Dee Brown, founds Dee Brown Masonry.
- 1964** Company is incorporated as Dee Brown Inc.
- 1969** Barnes joins the company as an estimator after earning a degree in industrial technology from Texas A&M-Commerce with a major in architecture and management.
- 1977** Dee Brown acquires Cardinal Masonry Co., Houston, and Southwest Masonry Inc., Austin.
- 1979** DBI is formed as a holding company to manage the acquisitions.
- 1983** Masonry Technology Inc. is formed to compete with the strong open shop construction market in Texas.
- 1985** DBM Marble and Granite is formed to handle stone projects nationwide.
- 1987** Barnes’ older son, Rob, works his first summer at DBI. He earned a degree in business and construction management at John Brown University and is currently vice president of estimating and marketing.
- 1989** A 50-50 partnership is formed with

Hatch Masonry, Los Angeles, and by 1992 DBM/Hatch Inc. is a wholly owned subsidiary.

- 1990** Barnes is named president and COO, completing the transfer of management from Dee Brown.
- 1995** The names Dee Brown Masonry, Masonry Technology, and DBM Marble and Granite are no longer in use; all operations are consolidated into DBI.
- 1998** A partnership – Kepco+DBI LLC – is formed with Kepco+Inc., a Salt Lake City-based panel manufacturer and stone erector.
- 2000** Barnes younger son, David, takes the position of project manager after completing his B.S. in industrial technology at Texas A&M-Commerce in construction management and architecture.
- 2000** Dee Brown dies at the age of 71, having remained active in the company even after stepping down from the day-to-day operations.
- 2002** Innovative Masonry Inc., a minority business company performing masonry work, is established with DBI as a 45% owner.



long, the walls will depict coral reef images carved out of travertine fabricated in Italy. DBI is working closely with Goldberg as he selects the material and develops design drawings for each individual stone. The units vary from 4-inches to 12-inches thick. DBI masons will assemble the walls by following a numbered plan.

NAUVOO TEMPLE, NAUVOO, ILL.

Some projects call for restoration and others for reconstruction, but the Nauvoo Temple might be considered a resurrection. The original temple was razed in 1846 after 12,000 Mormons fled Nauvoo. Last year Kepco+DBI completed a new temple on the site to virtually the same specifications shown in the original architectural drawings, which resurfaced in 1948. To duplicate the exterior, stonemasons handcrafted the limestone blocks with the same patterns that appeared on the original stones. The entire structure was panelized, except for the base. The project received the Award of Excellence

from the Marble Institute of America earlier this year.

AMERICAN AIRLINES CENTER, DALLAS

The massive American Airlines Center showcases 158,000 square feet of masonry, including Swedish mahogany granite around the base of the building, Indiana limestone used for column bases and accents, and 381 site-fabricated brick panels erected with a custom-built counter-weighted mechanical cradle. The stadium's design, which suggests an ornate airline hangar, is punctuated with arches, balconies, soffits, and pilasters. The facility was named MASONRY CONSTRUCTION'S "Project of the Year" in 2002.

OUR LADY OF CLEAR CREEK MONASTERY, HULBERT, OKLA.

The U.S. order of Benedictine monks, currently inhabiting a 6000-square-foot facility in a remote part of Oklahoma, has turned to DBI to build what it calls "a

monastery to last 1000 years." Barnes said, "I've not seen anything like it in my career. We are going to build an old-style, loadbearing masonry monastery." The gothic design uses 24-inch-thick, solid reinforced brick and block walls. The first stone will be blessed in November and the project is slated for completion in 2005.

UTAH CAPITOL PRESERVATION PROJECT, SALT LAKE CITY

Kepco+DBI is working on two new four-story office buildings that comprise the first phase of the restoration of Utah's historic State Capitol complex, which was dedicated in 1914. The buildings were part of the original plans for the complex; however, there wasn't enough money to build them after \$2.5 million was spent on the Capitol. The new buildings follow the original architect's design, using granite to match the Capitol. The next phase of the project – restoration of the Capitol building itself – will begin next year and is slated for completion in 2008.