

Texas Construction

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East Meets Southwest

Toyota Supplier Building Concrete Relationship With Central Texas City

By Rob Patterson



The future \$7.5 million Tasus Corp. plant will sit on a 13-acre site in Georgetown and feature tilt-wall concrete slabs, a structural steel frame and, yes, a bit of feng shui.

Nagoya, Japan, and Georgetown, Texas, may be on opposite sides of the globe, but East met Southwest when the Japanese-owned Tasus Corp. decided to build a plastic-injection-molding plant in the growing Central Texas city.

The result thus far has been a delightful convergence of business interests, common values and philosophies.

The 112,000-sq.-ft. facility will supply plastic products to the automotive industry, expanding on the already existing operations at Tasus' factory in Bloomington, Ind. The \$7.5 million building situated on a 13-acre site on the south side of Georgetown will be constructed with a structural steel frame and tilt-wall concrete slabs totaling 6000 cu. yds. of concrete. Another 3000 cu. yds. will be poured for the surrounding paving.

Georgetown was chosen as the locale for the new facility for a variety of reasons. Since a number of injection-molding operations in the area have closed in recent years, there is a large local pool of available experienced workers. The city of Georgetown

assembled an attractive package of tax abatements and infrastructure improvements. A note of congruence also helped seal the deal.

"The downtown square of Georgetown looks almost identical to the downtown square in Bloomington, and Yasuyuki Ohara, chairman of Tasus Corp., really liked that when he visited," said Walt Barkalow, general manager for the Tasus Texas Corp. Taking its cue from values of the Japanese parent corporation, Tasus stresses community involvement, local hiring and utilizing contractors and suppliers in the community when possible. The company chose Georgetown-based FTWOODS Construction Services Inc. for the design-build contract not just because of what Barkalow called the contractor's "strong local reputation," but also its dedication to com-

munity involvement and general business principles. FTWOODS' motto is, "We build relationships, we also build buildings."

President Todd Woods founded the company in 1987 after working for a larger company. "I didn't necessarily like the way business ethics were there, and I wanted to build a different kind of company where you treated people the way you like to be treated, and have more of a team relationship with subcontractors and suppliers because it takes all of us to get a job done."

Planning Ahead. Initial plans called for a three-phase construction process, starting with 45,000 sq. ft. of manufacturing space and 15,000 sq. ft. of office in a single structure. The original design specifications were for a pre-engineered structural-steel building, determined by the budget and rapid timeline for completion.

"We were looking at pre-engineered because of the costs," Barkalow said. During the initial design discussions, FTWOODS put together a comparative study examining steel and concrete options.

"When the owners came from Japan, they wanted something that was more long term and built to last, less maintenance costs," Woods said. Since Georgetown ordinances require about 75 percent masonry exterior on new industrial buildings, tilt walls made more sense.

The decision was also made to proceed simultaneously with phases one and two, adding 52,000 sq. ft. of manufacturing space. The design also allows for another 50,000 sq. ft. to be added to the northern side of the building without affecting ongoing operations in the existing structure.

"It's set up with that flexibility in mind. The new unit can be dropped in, and manufacturing can continue in the older facility," Barkalow said.

The official groundbreaking was in March, site preparation began in June and the facility is slated for an early 2005 finish, putting the job on the fast track. The shift-to-tilt wall system will help accommodate the tight schedule.

"Tilt-wall definitely speeds up the process and provides an enduring structure," said Richard Elasser of Elasser Architectural Inc. in Georgetown. He added that with the recently rising cost of structural steel, "now is the time to have a better building for what is probably a more competitive price."

Building Faces Eastward. During design review, the structure was simplified, based in part on the Oriental principles of feng shui that the Japanese parent corporation stressed to the Georgetown team. "On first design review, we had a lot more detailing involved," Elasser said.

"Now there's an Eastern influence on the architecture stressing simplicity, clean lines and strong form," he added. He cited the basic slab atop a single column for the porte-cochere at the building's entrance as an example. "The one column emphasizes strength in the design where two or more symbolize weakness."

Accents and character will be incorporated into the structure through chamfer joining and scoring in some of the tilt walls, while other walls will have textures incorporated into the finish.

The principles of feng shui also call for the building to face eastward. Because the sun can be strong early in the day, simple shading elements were incorporated into the front of the building.

Perhaps the most daunting element of the project is the site itself. “Central Texas has the Balcones Fault that runs parallel to Interstate 35,” said Austin-based project engineer Scot Gordon of CTL/Thompson Texas LLC. A division of Denver, Colo.-based CTL/Thompson Inc., the firm provided geophysical engineering for the project. “Anything east of there, you’re going to get into expansive materials, clays that are pretty thick. West of the fault you’re likely to hit rock at a fairly shallow level. The site is pretty much straddling that line.”

Ground Control. The large amounts of blackland prairie dirt with a high clay content found on the site are partly the result of it being filled in 1982 with material excavated from a nearby construction project. It will be replaced by a granular select fill with a plasticity index of less than 15 percent, using native material.

“The big thing is to get something that won’t swell when it gets wet,” Gordon said. **“It will reduce the potential for vertical movement so the slab has a better chance of performing and doesn’t crack. With a building that big, you do not want differential movement. It’s a heavy load, but it’s also a big area.”**

The owners and the city also concurred in preserving a number of large mature trees within the acreage. “They pay a tremendous amount of attention to the interface with the environment,” Elasser said of the Tاسus philosophy. Despite recent record-breaking rain levels, the decision to build a tilt-wall structure might reduce any delays caused by the weather. The mix, supplied by Tex-Mix Concrete of Hutto, will also help meet the tight schedule. “To keep the process going more quickly and smoothly we will probably use a higher cement content in the mix for a quicker set-up.” Elasser said.

Key Players

General Contractor/Design Builder: FTWOODS Construction Services Inc., Georgetown

Project Executive: Iain Sproull

Project Manager: S.C. Inman, III

Field Superintendent: Matt Holley

Owner: Tاسus Texas Corp., Georgetown

Architect: Richard Elasser, Elasser Architectural Inc., Georgetown

Structural Engineer: LOC Consultants LLP, Austin

Civil Engineer: Steger & Bizzell Engineering Inc., Georgetown

Geophysical Engineer: CTL/Thompson Texas LLC, Austin

Concrete Supplier: Tex Mix Concrete, Hutto



Site work recently began on the 112,000-sq.-ft. facility that will supply plastic products to the automotive industry.

Woods said recent price increases in steel, as well as shortages and delays in supply, could cause a problem with the building’s structural steel, “but I think we’ll be OK because we started on this a while ago.”

A new city sewer line will be constructed to go around the facility, and the old tunnel that runs underneath the location will be sealed.

‘We’re Ready for Business’. Once completed, the Tاسus facility will manufacture products such as speaker enclosures and fluid reservoirs. It eventually will employ about 100 people. Because the Bloomington plant is operating at near capacity, the Georgetown facility is intended to serve pre-existing clients that are tier-one automotive suppliers located in El Paso, McAllen and Shreveport at lower freight costs. It also will cultivate new business.

Tاسus in Bloomington sells to tier-one suppliers of Toyota Motor Corp. USA as well as serving as a tier-one direct supplier to Toyota itself. Since Toyota is building a new plant in San Antonio, the Georgetown facility is a proactive tactic by Tاسus to take advantage of the proximity.

“It’s a marketing strategy to let Toyota know that we are here, we’re set up and we’re ready for some new business,” Barkalow said.

High points were given from all quarters to the city of Georgetown in its efforts to attract the Tاسus plant and smoothly pave the way for its construction. “The community and the city were very helpful and very cooperative,” Barkalow said.

He is especially grateful to Tاسus for its accent on hiring local management and workers, particularly since he left his last position as president of a local, now out-of-business plastics company not long ago. “To be looking nationally for a job for a year and a half and end up getting a position here in Georgetown is pretty good,” Barkalow added. He said he hopes that he will be able to rehire some of his former employees.

As nearby Austin and Round Rock grow, the Tاسus plant will serve as a keystone facility in the industrially zoned area on the south side of Georgetown, where the city hopes to attract more industry. “It’s going to be great for Georgetown and Williamson County as well as the Central Texas area,” Woods said.



CTL/Thompson Texas LLC provided geophysical engineering for the project, which is sited on the Balcones Fault.