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JLC's

Letters

Designer Defends Competitive Bidding

To the Editor:

As a former design-build contractor turned designer, I agree with Paul Eldrenkamp up to a point ("Farewell. To Competitive Bidding," 7/97). I've been on both sides of the fence, as a contractor bidding jobs and doing negotiated bid work, and as a designer recommending to clients whether to put a job out to bid or work with one contractor.

I agree that no-bid is the best way to go for a contractor, although as Paul mentions, you might miss out on some of the big designed projects and the chance to develop a working relationship with an architect that could lead to future no-bid work. I would never recommend no-bid to a client with a contractor I hadn't worked with in the past. However, once I've successfully completed a bid job with a contractor, I might recommend no-bid on the next project, if the client is open to it.

I don't agree that no-bid is necessarily the best value for the client. Despite all its disadvantages to the contractor, bidding keeps you sharp, and provides an incentive to maximize efficiency of crew and subs. I know many contractors who found out the hard way that their plumber or painter was charging way too much and found a new one for the next bid. I don't believe that price equals performance. Many subcontractors charge less because they are more skilled and efficient, and can make as much money in less time.

When Paul makes his no-bid pitch to clients, I think he is selling something more than just the no-bid, service-first concept. He is showing his prospective clients that he is an intelli-

gent, thoughtful, trustworthy professional, not just some Joe out to make a buck. This same pitch would work just as well in a bid situation. Sure, the client has been programmed to pick the low or middle bidder. That's why you have to show how your workmanship, organization, and service are superior to the other bidders. Take the drawings, point out the gray areas and ask the client to compare your approach to the other bidders.

If you do great work, show it to your prospective clients, educate them about the details that make a difference, and they'll pay you to do the job, bid or no-bid. And remember that a bid job for an architect today could result in ten no-bid jobs in the future.

David Hornstein
Lighthouse Design
Lexington, Mass.

No-Bid Better

To the Editor:

Paul Eldrenkamp hit the nail right on the head (forgive the pun). I am a commercial GC and have found bidding (even though we still bid) to be expensive and demeaning. Just like doctors, lawyers, and architects, we provide a service. The service may not be as necessary or prestigious as some people seem to think, but it is a valuable service nonetheless.

I find it difficult to believe, however, that at least one individual in Paul's company is not completely, or nearly completely, devoted to business devel-

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opment. The nonbid work is out there, but developing the business, talking with past and future clients, letters, etc., takes an enormous amount of time and has to be a near full-time job if growth and revenues are to be maintained.

Bidding will always be a part of the construction business, but I want it to be minor part of our business. The challenge for all contractors (service providers) is selling our talents, skill, and value rather than price. This will not be an easy task, because owners, as well as members of our own profession, will perpetuate the "lowest is best" myth.

David Moreno
Alpha Builders, Inc.
Cleveland, Ohio

Paul Eldrenkamp responds:

I spend about half my time specifically on business development — sales, marketing, networking. But realistically, everything we do — from warranty call response time to courteous driving — is a form of business development. In that sense, everyone in the company is full-time sales and marketing.

Nail Giveaway

To the Editor:

A letter to the editor in your August issue addressed nails for cedar shingles. The author noted that he had abandoned the use of galvanized nails because he had disappointing experiences finding consistently well-coated nails that would not stain or streak. Maze Nails just sent the author, Mike Guertin, a sample box of our Stormguard cedar shingle nails. Each nail is actually dipped twice in molten zinc to assure a thick, uniform zinc coating. The coating does not chip off because these nails are so thoroughly processed. The protective zinc is tightly alloyed to the base steel. Only hot-dipped galvanized nails are recommended by the Cedar Shake and Shingle Bureau as being the most dependable corrosion-resistant zinc-coated nail available. Other methods of galvanizing produce nails with a non-uniform coating (for example,

tumbler galvanizing), a very thin coating (electroplating), or a coating that frequently chips when hammered (peen-plating). Of course, stainless steel and aluminum nails work well, too, if they are properly formed. But our Stormguard nails are less expensive than stainless steel and drive better than aluminum.

Roelif M. Loveland
W.H. Maze Nails
Peru, Ill.

Stiff Girder Question

To the Editor:

I read "Sizing Stiff Floor Girders" (*Practical Engineering*, 8/97) with interest. The subject of floor vibration has come up in the past, specifically in reference to the concrete thin slabs used for radiant floor heating. The authors give a formula that requires the natural frequency of both the joist and girder to get the natural frequency of the floor assembly as a whole. But I'm not clear on how to determine the natural frequency for the girder prior to plugging it into the floor system vibration formula.

I could treat a girder in a simple span situation in effect as a joist with a higher tributary load assumed to be applied uniformly along its length. But what about girders that have several intermediate supports?

John Siegenthaler
Appropriate Designs
Holland Patent, N.Y.

Frank Woeste responds:

I would use the same rule-of-thumb as we propose for simple-span dimension-lumber girders. That is, limit live-load deflection to span/600 with no clear span greater than 10 feet. I would not attempt to use the "floor system vibration" formula for multi-span floor girders.

Researchers have been studying this problem area for decades, and hopefully better design information will become available in the future.

Housewrap Helps

To the Editor:

Regarding your recent article on housewraps ("Can Moisture Beat

Housewrap?" *Notebook*, 6/97): We believe that paint and moisture problems are not the result of housewrap, but are due to moisture entering the wall cavity either from the outside or through the interior. We have covered at least a million homes and we believe the number of problems due to housewrap can be counted on one hand. There were moisture problems and paint problems before housewraps existed and there is no evidence of moisture problems due to housewraps unless they are covered with rips or tears, overlapped improperly, or deteriorated due to sun exposure. When applied properly, housewrap reduces air infiltration and protects the sheathing from moisture deterioration.

George Logan
Reemay Inc.
Kennett Square, Pa.

Correction in Kwik Ply Cost

To the Editor:

There were a couple of errors in the article "New Tech Tools and Materials" (7/97) regarding Kwik Ply self-adhered membrane. First, you state that the membrane is fiberglass reinforced; it is not. We reinforce it with dispersed polyester fibers. Second, you state the cost of the material as \$3 per square foot. In fact, the cost of Kwik Ply to the contractor is less than \$1 per square foot, while the installed cost with accessories is less than \$2 per square foot. I would appreciate it if you would inform your readers of this correction.

Joseph H. Nussbaum
Hyload Roofing Systems, Inc.
Wadsworth, Ohio

KEEP 'EM COMING! Letters must be signed and include the writer's address. *The Journal of Light Construction* reserves the right to edit for grammar, length, and clarity. Mail letters to *JLC*, RR 2, Box 146, Richmond, VT 05477; or e-mail to 76176.2053@compuserve.com.

