

Firm to build up health care biz

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One of Austin's top construction companies is increasing its operations and adding employees to support its growing health care practice.

Burt-Watts Industries Inc. recently brought on Troy Chapman, formerly with SpawMaxwell, as its new executive project manager for the health care group and added three additional project leaders to the group's roster. The company now has nearly 30 employees, a figure that should increase 50 percent in the next two years.

Burt-Watts wants to expand its work in health care, where it has worked for groups from Seton Family of Hospitals to the Central Texas Medical Center in San Marcos.

The company finished renovating Seton Medical Center Austin's 7,000-square-foot main pharmacy in August. The construction firm has been tapped by the Seton Family of Hospitals to renovate all of its existing hospital pharmacies to help meet new industry standards.

The pharmacy at Seton's hospital on 38th Street was expanded and redesigned, incorporating numerous cutting-edge technologies and features, such as a new clean room and a compounding room and an advanced robot that automatically fills prescriptions to help eliminate human error. The renovation also included the installation of a complex ventilation system that completely exchanges the air in the pharmacy 60 times an hour.

Work is under way on the other pharmacies.

Pat Garrett, interim director of operations for the pharmacy department at the Seton Family of Hospitals, says finding a contractor experienced in building clean rooms and working in a hospital setting was key in the selection of a group to handle the pharmacy project.

Garrett says the renovation of Seton's main pharmacy was a \$1.4 million project, and the total renovation effort will cost more than \$4 million.

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Launched in 2002 by Tommy Burt and Shane Watts, Burt-Watts ranks as one of Austin's fastest-growing private employers. The company logged \$11.2 million in revenue in 2006 -- up from \$7.9 million the year before -- and expects to more than double its year-over-year performance to \$30 million in 2007.

The average value of the company's projects has grown from about \$300,000 in its first year to nearly \$3.5 million today, with a concentration on three core areas: tenant improvements and finish-out, health care construction and new ground-up construction. Tenant improvement accounts for about 40 percent of the company's workload, with health care and ground-up construction both accounting for 30 percent.

Burt says population growth in Williamson and Hays counties is prompting the development of hospitals and medical districts in the outlying parts of the Austin area -- and that should spell new business for construction companies operating in the sector.

"There's a lot of opportunity there for us to grow with the [medical facilities] as they branch out and as existing ones get renovated," he says.

Fielding construction in a hospital that's operational 24/7 mandates strict safety precautions and an increased level of communication with stakeholders, says Watts. "We're dealing in very sensitive environments," he says.

Seton has been a client of Burt-Watts since 2003. The construction company has handled jobs ranging from remodeling existing doctors' offices to new, ground-up satellite medical office construction.

For a business that started in the midst of the last decline in the real estate market, Burt says the ramp-up of recent years has proved an exciting time.

But the large number of projects across the region has also made securing quality employees harder.

"Everyone here is working and everyone who has a good job wants to keep it," he says. "It's about finding people who want to make a move for more opportunity."