



Building Success in Alabama

BY BARBARA SLOAN

The Birmingham of 1964 was still producing mounds of iron and the city continued to reel from the previous year's events, which included the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church bombing and Martin Luther King, Jr.'s letter from the Birmingham jail.

President Lyndon B. Johnson was *Time* magazine's "Man of the Year" following his dramatic entry into the White House after the shocking assassination of John Kennedy. GI Joe dolls appeared, the Beatles occupied the *Billboard* Top Five, and the surgeon general warned the public against smoking cigarettes.

While Khrushchev was being deposed from the USSR's Communist Party, preludes to the Vietnam War

distantly rumbled when Congress approved the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution after North Vietnamese torpedo boats attacked U.S. destroyers. Americans' average annual salary was \$4,743 with the minimum wage at \$1 and the cost of a first-class stamp at five cents.

Despite the year's rockiness, 28-year-old Miller Gorrie, who had grown up during the Depression and World War II buying savings stamps and war bonds, cashed in some IBM shares that had jettisoned to \$80,000. With the proceeds, he purchased the Thomas C. Brasfield Company, a contracting business that had operated since 1922.

Miller Gorrie recalls that he paid \$45,000 to Brasfield and actually acquired not only the business, but



President Jim Gorrie



Brasfield & Gorrie projects include (opposite page) St. Vincent's Hospital expansion in Birmingham and (above from left) U.S. Air at Tampa International Airport, Interstate 65/59 interchange, Samford University Science Center and (above) AmSouth Bank Operations Center, all in Birmingham.

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also \$5,000 to \$10,000 worth of equipment, an office, a secretary, and two supervisors. Soon he hired Jim Anthony and they all worked day and night, and bid low, to get the business off the ground. Early on, the firm secured a number of medical contracts. Three years later, the already thriving company moved to its present location on Birmingham's Southside and changed its name to Brasfield & Gorrie.

Today, during its 40th anniversary year, when clients swing off the Red Mountain Expressway to visit this very site, they must stop at a light directly facing a tremendous Brasfield & Gorrie expansion to St. Vincent's Hospital. And the entire block behind Brasfield & Gorrie's attractively updated headquarters is bustling with its own massive 40,000-square-foot extension, naturally being handled by Brasfield & Gorrie.

The soaring St. Vincent's project showcases the company's forte: multi-story concrete projects. After his 1972 "Birmingham Green" development revitalized the downtown area, Miller Gorrie decided to specialize. The com-



Brasfield & Gorrie's distinctive work on Birmingham's AmSouth-Harbert Plaza (above) changed the hometown skyline.

pany accepted the task of building a tall concrete edifice for the University of Alabama at Birmingham campus. When the project turned out well, Brasfield & Gorrie decided to focus on distinctive concrete structures, eventually completing a large number of high-rises.

This early 1980s success led the company to bid more and more outside Birmingham and to expand into

the condominium explosion on the Gulf Coast. After that building boom cooled, Brasfield & Gorrie decided to move its Florida crews to take advantage of a building surge in central Florida. To cement its reputation in Florida, the firm undertook the \$25 million City Hall project in Orlando, its first really big project to make a mark in the Sunshine State. To raze the former city hall, the company imploded the old building, a feat that turned into film footage in the movie *Letal Weapon 2*.

Meanwhile in Birmingham, the company's distinctive work on the AmSouth-Harbert Plaza changed the hometown skyline, and the building of the Kirklin Clinic, HealthSouth Center, and additions to the St. Vin-

cent's Hospital campus provided further entry into burgeoning healthcare facilities in the Magic City.

The Birmingham of the 1980s and '90s had rapidly moved beyond economic reliance on fiery furnaces to become a leading healthcare center with over 15 hospitals. So even today, though Brasfield & Gorrie provides construction services for all types of building projects — including industrial, multi-story office, institutional, condominium, hotel, retail, parking, and water treatment — healthcare facilities provide a large majority of its projects.

Jim Gorrie, who took over as president in 1995, says, "We had been working with Medical Center East since 1969 and then in 1981, we

The Watercolor Condos in Santa Rosa Beach, Fla., was a Brasfield & Gorrie project.



picked up St. Vincent's as well as several other local hospitals. This type of construction has just flourished for us."

For four decades, Brasfield & Gorrie has executed numerous successful healthcare and other projects in 16 states. After expanding into the Florida and Georgia markets, the firm eventually spread to five full-service offices located in Atlanta, Birmingham, Nashville, Orlando, and Raleigh with 12 operating divisions, each organized as an independent profit center maintaining a combined staff of more than 1,600 highly qualified and skilled professionals.

In its 2004 Construction and Design Survey issue, *Modern Healthcare Magazine* named Brasfield & Gorrie the number one healthcare general contractor in the nation. Healthcare construction dollar volume for 2003 — totaling \$487.13 million — placed Brasfield & Gorrie in this position. In fact, for the past six years, the magazine has consistently ranked this Forbes 500 Company as one of the top three contractors in America.

"I believe," Jim Gorrie suggests,



Constructed by Brasfield & Gorrie and designed by world renowned architect I. M. Pei, the center of Birmingham's Kirkland Clinic features a six-story concrete frame structure with two mechanical mezzanine levels.

"that our success in constructing healthcare facilities has prospered because of the trust factor we have built with our clients. Any hospital provider has to have faith in its contractors. As we build, we are operating around critical care service all the time. If you supply what you say you will, if you do what you are expected to do, you will get contracts. These agreements lead to long-term relationships that grow over time. Over 40 years, we have gained a couple of new clients every year while remaining the top choice of our former clients."

Client satisfaction helps Brasfield &

Gorrie consistently rank as a leading construction firm in the country, and apparently is the reason that repeat clients constitute more than 86 percent of its work. Starting in 1975, *Engineering News-Record* has continually ranked the firm among the industry's top 400 contractors, and its national position has climbed steadily year by year.

This past year's *Record* placed Brasfield & Gorrie 36th, a substantial move up the list from 2002's 44th position. This standing was based on annual revenue of \$1.04 billion in 2003. Other notable rankings released in this issue include the company as number 28 in Top 100 Contractors by New Contracts, number 21 in Top 50 in Domestic General Building Revenue, and number 44 in Top 50 Domestic Heavy Contractors. And from 1992 to the present, the Associated Builders and Contractors Association has designated the company as an Accredited Quality Contractor for commitments to safety, training, employee benefits and community relations.

Constructed in 1992 by Brasfield & Gorrie, Orlando City Hall features contemporary architecture with Roman Revival elements.



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Since 1969, Brasfield & Gorrie has managed over 20 million square feet of renovation and new construction just in healthcare projects alone. Jim Gorrie says, “We have developed internal training programs to stay current with the new healthcare practices. We are dedicated to being among the best in this business.”

Just in the last couple of years, the company has landed a number of expansive healthcare facility contracts. Gorrie says, “One of the most innovative healthcare projects we have going right now is the Celebration Health hospital in Orlando, a joint venture between Walt Disney World and Florida Hospital on 5,000 acres in Kissimmee.” This hospital of “Tomorrowland” is a true state-of-the-art facility with urgent and primary care, as well as a fitness center, restaurant, shops, conference center, library and special amenities such as cooking and nutrition classes.

Another new development is a collaboration between Brasfield & Gorrie, M.B. Kahn, and Southern Management Group for three projects at the Medical University of South Carolina. Other ventures include the two Birmingham assignments — the St. Vincent’s expansion and a new med-

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ical office building for Medical Center East — as well as an All Children’s Hospital replacement facility located in St. Petersburg, Madison Surgery Center in north Alabama, and a five-story concrete structure with brick veneer for the Children’s Healthcare of Atlanta at Egleston.

Not a healthcare facility, but



Now under construction by Brasfield & Gorrie, Atlanta’s The Georgia Aquarium has been touted to be the largest aquarium of its kind in the nation. This 430,000-square-foot facility will cover six acres of land and include eight acres of floor space.

another exciting and completely new type of project in Georgia is the Atlanta Aquarium. In the 1990s, Brasfield & Gorrie earned a stable place in the Atlanta market by providing 50,000 cubic yards of concrete for the \$30 million Georgia Dome, home to the 1994 Superbowl and the 1996 Summer Olympics.

During these exciting projects in the mid-1990s, Miller Gorrie was nearing retirement age. He knew he either had to sell his company (for which he had had many attractive offers) or put into place a younger cohort of management.

To his delight, his son Jim stepped up first to a vice-presidency and then presidency. Jim admits, “This second generation of leadership is interesting and challenging. We have all found that we certainly inherited a reputation for doing things right, as well as the infrastructure of tremendous service and outstanding quality. To have that platform to build from is challenging.”

But the younger Gorrie reveals that the headquarters location in Birmingham has huge benefits. “Being a contractor in Alabama is an amazing venture,” he says. “Not many people realize the breadth and depth of the construction industry in this state. I think it all dates back to the early days of Daniel Construction and Rust Engineering. With their expansive success,

a culture of subcontractors and wholesalers was strongly built up. They have left a huge legacy, which has encouraged lots of talent in vendors, contractors and providers. Success breeds success. This has also ultimately led to Alabama’s having very strong builders and contractor trade associations — in fact the strongest trade organizations in the country.”

Brasfield & Gorrie has a long legacy of giving back to the community. “We love the culture here,” says Jim Gorrie, who is thoroughly engaged in United Way. Company workers are also involved in the March of Dimes, Habitat for Humanity, Race for the Cure and many other cultural events in all its satellite cities.

“Another part of our contribution to society is all the non-profits we build for,” Jim points out. “We have constructed the YMCA, homeless shelters, and other such structures. Also, some companies shy away from churches, but we embrace working for our places of worship.”

Jim Gorrie says having the corporate headquarters in Birmingham is a great recruiting tool. “When we bring people to Birmingham for the first time, they are amazed at what a wonderful community it is. We are proud to be located here. We all love the city and community. It doesn’t take long for people to recognize what a great secret the city really is.” ■