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All jobs except for two

PBS Engineering steers clear of nuclear and single-family housing projects

BY WENDY CULVERWELL
BUSINESS JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

Born of necessity 25 years ago, PBS Engineering and Environmental celebrates its silver anniversary this year as a growing concern poised to become the dominant employer of Portland's Lair Hill neighborhood.

Architect Ned Peck, along with David Butts and Stephen Smiley, formed PBS in 1982 because a client, the U.S. Postal Service, needed a hazardous materials consultant to help with asbestos issues.

Today, PBS has grown to eight offices with 150 employees working in every aspect of project planning, with just two exceptions. The firm doesn't take on nuclear work or single-family residential projects.

Beyond that, the sky's the limit and over its history, PBS has worked on more than 35,000 widely disparate projects, ranging from highway construction to demolition of Portland's infamous Whitaker Middle School.

Right now, PBS is preparing to take on a pair of projects of its own. Squeezed for space, PBS is buying two buildings in the Lair Hill neighborhood it calls home.

Together, the buildings will add 16,000 square feet of much-needed office space and a 35-space parking lot in the 4300 and 4400 blocks of Southwest Corbett Avenue.

Ron Petti, president and chief executive officer, envisions a PBS campus on Corbett as the firm grows and takes over the buildings, which will be substantially remodeled.

The \$2.5 million deal closed June 19.

PBS moved to Lair Hill in 2001 for the simple reason that it got a great price on a dilapidated barn-style building.

It renovated the building to accommodate about 50 of its employees along with a separate architectural practice that leases space from PBS. The building retains the brick exterior and impressive roof trusses of the original structure, but otherwise is almost entirely new.

Tom Archer, who directs PBS's sustainable design services division, is planning environmentally sensitive remakes for the two new additions. He plans to pursue the U.S. Green Building Council's Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design certification for a commercial interior redesign.

The new space will give breathing room to a firm that has added more than 100 people to its staff in Portland in the past two years, Petti



CATHY CHENEY | PORTLAND BUSINESS JOURNAL

Ron Petti, PBS president and CEO, is overseeing a growth spree at the 25-year-old firm.

PBS ENGINEERING

CHIEF EXECUTIVE:

Ron Petti, who is also president.

WHAT WE DO:

Handles all aspects of environmental project planning. Formed because the founders needed to provide the U.S. Postal Service with help on the agency's asbestos issues.

LOCATION: Portland's Lair Hill neighborhood.

CONTACT: Pbsenv.com.

said. Over the same period, companywide billings have grown from about \$12 million in 2005 to more than \$15 million in anticipated billings this year.

Growth didn't come fast in the beginning.

In the first few years of its existence, there wasn't much work for firms specializing in environmental work and PBS "bounced along" in Petti's words with a handful of employees.

The late 1980s brought a bevy of new environmental regulations including an emergency act to abate asbestos in schools. Business boomed alongside the new mandate to manage asbestos and other once-common hazardous materials used in construction.

Petti, who was working on hazardous materials issues for Multnomah County, said that at the outset, PBS was the only firm in town with the expertise he needed.

He joined the firm in 1988 as a project man-

Business boomed alongside the new mandate to manage asbestos and other once-common hazardous materials used in construction.

ager. Today, he is one of seven partners in the privately held company.

Its recent growth comes from a variety of sources.

Two of its largest ongoing projects are highway projects in Oregon and Washington. In Oregon, PBS is providing environmental design and compliance management services for the U.S. 20 project, which is realigning the highway between Newport and Corvallis. The highway corridor passes fish-bearing streams and eagle habitat, among other challenges.

In Washington state, PBS is handling the environmental permitting and inspection work for a \$190 million freeway project in Everett.

School construction has been another

PBS: Demolition to construction

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growth industry, thanks to voter approval of hundreds of millions of dollars worth of school projects in Beaverton and North Clackamas last fall.

Ironically, one of its more recent school projects wasn't construction but rather, demolition.

PBS oversaw demolition of Portland's Whitaker Middle School.

The problematic school opened in 1966 and was immediately plagued by sticky windows, toxic mold, a leaky roof, asbestos and structural problems that led to its 1991 closure.

The 270,000-square-foot building was demolished over the past winter, with PBS managing the hazardous materials contained in the building, recycling of old materials and the final condition of the 10-acre property.

The district is selling 5.8 acres for residential development.

Alternative energy represents another growth opportunity for PBS, Petti said.

The firm has worked on siting issues for wind-driven power facilities throughout the Columbia Gorge, on behalf of clients such as PPM Energy and others.

Its wide-ranging expertise has made PBS one of Portland's top environmental and engineering firms, with entries in two lists compiled by the *Portland Business Journal*.

In 2006, it was the region's 11th-largest environmental consulting firm for billings and the 18th-largest engineering firm, by number of engineers.