

# Seven P's Contractors

...where T.E.A.M "Building" is the foundation for success.

by Cynthia Scanlon

photography by Keith Perry



In 1990, when Dennis Smith thought about starting a contracting business, he envisioned a company that would go beyond traditional construction paradigms, a company that would build quality projects and place customer service as its centerpiece. This company would be founded on the principles of hard work, honesty, integrity and pride of workmanship. What he designed was a company called Seven Ps Contractors, Inc. With the help of his team, what he built is a **success story**.

"A metal stud is a metal stud and drywall is drywall," says Smith, president and team leader of Seven Ps. "The systems are in place. It's the management of those systems and the service we give to our customers that sets us apart."

To achieve his goals, Smith carefully gathered together a group of highly creative and skilled professionals to form the foundation of his company. Then, like all good leaders, he let their unique and diverse backgrounds and observations define and enhance his company's goals. ►

Since 1990, Seven P's has had numerous projects throughout the Valley, including medical facilities, banks, retail centers and high rises. They've also designed and built expensive, customized homes. Despite the complexities of some of these projects, Smith and his team still bring the simple philosophies of honesty and integrity to every project they do. "I tell the truth because it's easy to remember," he says.

Some of Seven P's most notable projects include the Murphy House in Gainey Ranch; the Palm Cove development, a 112-unit luxury condominium community in McCormick Ranch; and Talley Industries. The company has also been involved in tenant improvement projects for Phoenix Memorial Hospital, Motorola Employees Credit Union, Shepler's Western Wear and Desert Valley Medical Plaza.

Seven P's is currently finalizing construction plans for its newest and most prestigious project in fall 1995, the \$25 million Grayhawk development. These 215 luxury townhomes will be in a strategically planned golf course community located in north Scottsdale and will range in prices from \$250,000 to \$300,000.

Smith himself has been involved in construction since he



Palm Cove, Scottsdale

was a boy, first helping his father, who was a Michigan contractor and developer. As he grew older, Smith worked as a mason, assistant superintendent, foreman, iron worker and heavy equipment operator.

In 1980, he worked for the general contractor that built the Borgata, in Scottsdale, which is still one of his favorites projects.

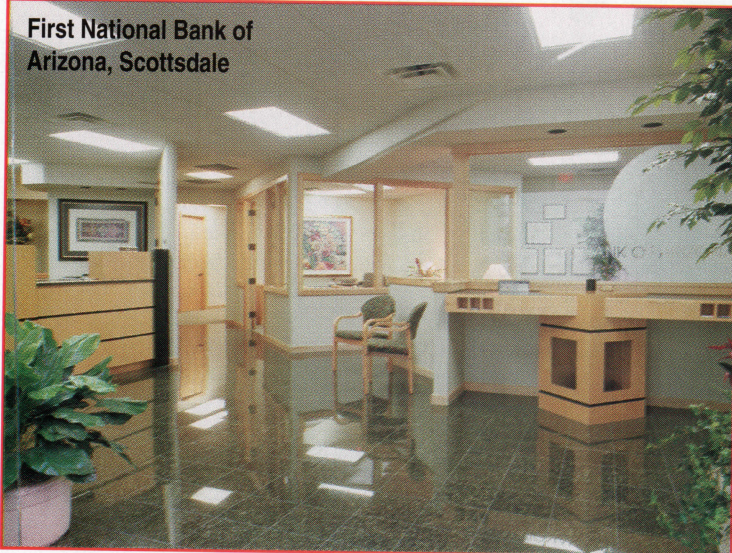
"That was the first job I did in Arizona," he says. "There's not a lot of those kinds of projects that get built, but the owner had great communication skills and we had good subcontractors."

Smith recognized the importance of clear communication skills and incorporated them into Seven P's. Before a blueprint is drawn or a foundation is laid, the company's members sit down with the client and brainstorm ideas, challenges and solutions that might be encountered on a job site. They draw information and enthusiasm from one another to create a finished product that is as distinctive as it is pleasing.

"We have the freedom to ask questions in the beginning," says Cheryl Garner, Seven P's team manager. "This way, we can avoid unnecessary mistakes later on."

It is this belief in teamwork, this philosophy that Together Everybody Achieves More that drives the company. Members rely on the synergy created between talented and inspired individuals to create uncommon ideas and solutions that might not be accessible through traditional forms of management leadership. They know these powerful components

First National Bank of  
Arizona, Scottsdale



are then reflected in their finished work.

"If anyone on our team is in a position of uncertainty, they can rely on each other for direction or support, and the guidance they need is there for them,"

says Garner. "That leaves our people independent to function, which fosters creativity and freedom in their responsibilities."

Garner, who has a background in business management, spent 10 years as a financial analyst with a Fortune 500 electronics manufacturer in their corporate accounting department. She also has extensive experience in inside sales and engineering. She now brings her organizational skills and attention to detail to all of Seven P's projects by managing the communication between subcontractors, superintendents and clients. Garner's view of teamwork strategy is easy to remember and easier to see in the company's accomplishments: "Everybody is the customer, and the customer is everything."

This simple, yet powerful philosophy has paid off handsomely. Last year, the company doubled its sales revenues, while providing quality work on time and within budget. As a result, revenues are expected to exceed next year's projections.

"We don't want to bid on every job out there," Smith says.



Motorola Credit Union, Scottsdale



Harding Lawson Engineers, Phoenix

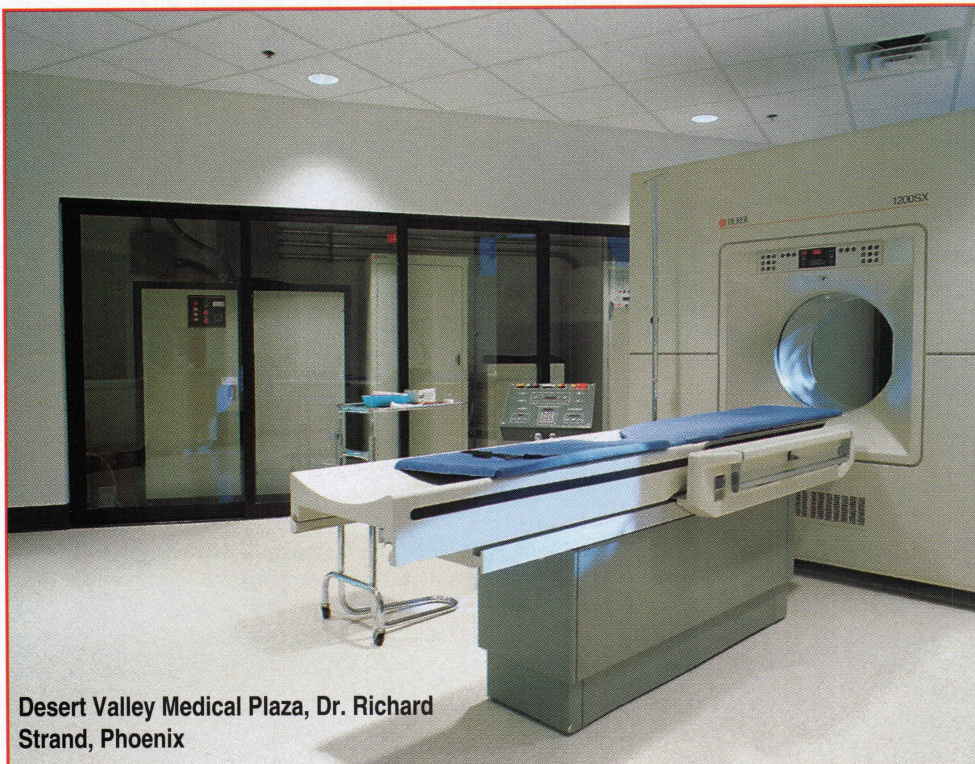
"What we want to achieve is steady, controlled growth."

One final factor in Seven P's success is the careful selection of its subcontractors, superintendents and construction managers. They are all carefully evaluated for their professional skills, work ethics and values. "Our subcontractors may as well be Seven Ps employees because they represent us directly," Smith says.

By incorporating these subcontractors into the planning stages of the project, Seven P's building costs and mistakes

are kept to a minimum, while ensuring that the right materials and construction methods are selected. Some other construction companies miss this crucial beginning phase, running over budget and missing deadlines. Smith takes care to see that that doesn't happen to his clients. "Take care of the little things, and the big things will take care of themselves," he emphasizes.

This attention to detail can also be seen in the architects, property managers and real estate



Desert Valley Medical Plaza, Dr. Richard Strand, Phoenix

Robert and Linda Murphy residence, Gainey Ranch, Scottsdale



agents that Seven Ps partners with. This is further evidenced by the fact that their business is 90 percent repeat clientele.

This doesn't mean that the company skips its share of challenges. On the contrary, the company faces just as many obstacles as other contractors. In fact, Seven P's way of doing business creates challenges the team might not otherwise have if they didn't care.

"Construction is an industry stereotypically defined as poor dress, bad language and dirty work environments," says Garner. "Seven Ps does not support this way of doing business. We have a dress code. We do not tolerate foul language, radios or smoking on the job site. Our work sites are clean, and in our industry, these things are a challenge."

They also have an unusual, but effective, way of not only running a successful contracting firm, but elevating an industry. "Seven P's success in the market place has raised the construction industry's respect of contractors," says Dennis Gaffney, who joined the company in 1994 and now leads the company's custom home division.

Dan Williams, who started with Smith a year and a half ago, echoes Gaffney's sentiment. "Our goal is to do the project right and on time. So we run a clean, well-built, well-run job," he says. Williams has been recently involved in the construction of the Biddulph Oldsmobile expansion in Sun

City. Next month, he will begin an expansion of Norwood Furniture in Gilbert.

Rounding out the company's team is Skip Martinaitis, who has been with the company since its inception. Martinaitis met Smith when the two of them were working on the Borgata. "Dennis is unique," says Martinaitis. "He impresses me with how he handles situations."

While the tenants under which Seven P's operates may sound simple, Smith cautions that the right behavior is not enough to be a competent contractor. He warns against those who stress customer services, but don't have the knowledge or skills necessary to back up their work. "In this market, guys can get their license, buy a pickup truck and say they are in business," he says. "But how long have they been in business? Do they have an office? Do the employees work as a team? Do they have the right tools? There's a lot more to it than having a pager and a pickup truck."

Despite his differentiating ways of doing business, Dennis Smith insists he is just running a company where simple philosophies like respect, truthfulness and openmindedness pay off. By treating people the way he wants to be treated, he has taken his construction company to new levels of growth.

"I'm not re-creating the wheel," he says. "I'm just trying to make the wheel spin easier."

Spinning his company's wheel shows no signs of slowing in the future. While building continues in the Valley, with competition reaching a sometimes fever pitch, Smith believes that quality workmanship and an ability to work with a client every step of the way through a project will always be in demand.

"The future will belong to contractors that can not only perform in their construction, but can perform in the project management and customer service arena as well," he says. "It's going to have to be a team effort."

**AB**



Shepler's Western Wear, Phoenix