

Real Estate Journal

THE LARGEST WEEKLY COMMERCIAL/INVESTMENT NEWSPAPER IN THE WORLD

C.W. Brown Inc. is at the forefront of eco-friendly practices in the commercial construction industry



Decorative wall and staircase at Fordham University Grad Center



Corporate Headquarters Facility renovations at NYU School of Medicine, NYU Business School and New York University. In addition, the Browns have left their stamp on Fordham University's Bronx campus.

Well before climate change began to challenge the commercial construction industry to create green or environmentally friendly buildings, C.W. Brown was aggressively pursuing an innovative agenda, not only on the ecology front, but in the way the private company is run and the stamp its owners make on reducing its carbon footprint.

To leave a noticeable eco-friendly footprint, innovation has to be part of a company's DNA. C.W. Brown's owners - a husband and wife team - are hardwired for innovation, which is reflected in how they operate their 25 year old construction company. The chief executive officer (CEO) is Renée Brown. While having a woman at the helm of a company is slowly becoming more commonplace in corporate America, a woman running one of the fastest-growing construction companies is innovation on steroids. This places C.W. Brown within an elite group: the Women's Business Enterprise (WBE) network. WBENC - The Women's Business Enterprise National Council, the nation's leading third-party certifier of women's business enterprises, performs a rigorous and stringent certification process to confirm that the business is owned, controlled, and managed by a woman.

A woman-run enterprise in the construction industry is indeed an anomaly, as is a husband-and-wife duo steering the company. Charles Brown Jr., president of C.W. Brown, launched the company with his wife in 1984, starting off with just a van, two carpenters, and a small contract to renovate a car dealership. Seven years later, C.W. Brown made the 1990 list of Inc. Magazine's 500 fastest-growing private companies in America. In 2004, C.W. Brown received the Small Business Success Award from the Business Council of Westchester.

When many corporations, including commercial construction companies, were contracting during the past couple of years, C.W. Brown continued to expand and pursue strategies to foster its own long-term growth. Last year, the Browns launched an employee stock ownership plan (ESOP), giving their 24-person office staff, a collective 10 percent share in the company. This deferred-compensation benefit plan creates a market for stock held by the owners and helps retain top employees.

An estimated 10 million employees in the United States, or 10% of the private-sector workforce, participate in an ESOP, according to the ESOP Association in Washington, D.C. An ESOP is an extra employee incentive and provides employees with long-term retirement benefits. "It just seemed like a natural step," Renée Brown said. "It's to keep people for the long term."

Giving employees an ownership share in the company is just one example of C.W. Brown's strong belief in planning for the long haul - a challenging stance, given the push for short-term results that can diminish vitality in long term. This stance is also reflected in some of C.W. Brown's recent work in the Westchester County area, including a major renovation of Fordham Graduate Center, a 1960, 62,500 s/f building in disrepair. The Browns used recycled materials and employed eco-friendly practices to renovate and restore its beautiful architectural details. "We were able to take an abandoned building and revitalize it into a state-of-the-art facility," Renée Brown said.

Similarly, C.W. Brown restored a 145 year old stone chapel and built a green classroom at Manhattanville College. The building was constructed with reclaimed wood siding from the Baltimore Harbor, recycled masonry blocks, and bio-fiber wheat board.

C.W. Brown has also performed numerous renovations in New York City, including

These efforts will help reduce the unfriendly footprint that corporations, communities, and individuals are leaving behind, the Browns said.

Giving back to the community, or "paying it forward," is a philosophy the Browns and their staff incorporated into their culture when Catherine Ryan Hyde's 2000 book *Paying It Forward* started an unexpected movement that challenged students to change the world. This

philosophy wasn't new to the Browns, but it did give them a popular phrase with which to define one of their beliefs. In fact, the Browns want to start their own sustainable movement called Brown is Green.

C.W. Brown's commitment to using state-of-the-art practices is also evidenced in the greening of its 43,000 s/f headquarters in Armonk, New York. The newly renovated headquarters, expected to be completed in the first quarter of 2010, goes beyond employing common-sense, energy-saving practices. The Browns and its staff are striving to achieve Platinum level LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certification. This is noteworthy: C.W. Brown will be the first commercial building in Westchester County to be awarded this highest certification by the U.S. Green Building Council, a nonprofit organization dedicated to sustainable building design and construction.

To provide some perspective, the LEED certification is similar to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) creating a certification process to guide food makers when developing "certified" organic products. Achieving organic certification, as with Platinum LEED certification, is arduous and challenging. But reaching for the top rung will place C.W. Brown within a select group of companies and organizations, including some Fortune 500 companies, which have obtained this certification.

C.W. Brown's new headquarters will serve as a showcase for clients, industry, and the community. The company's new eco-home will also become a center for education and learning, showing students that living by green principles is

fundamental to the welfare of society. Among the headquarters' key eco-friendly features:

- * Seventy-five percent or more of the demolition debris will be diverted away from landfills.

- * All the building's electricity will be supplied by solar panels.

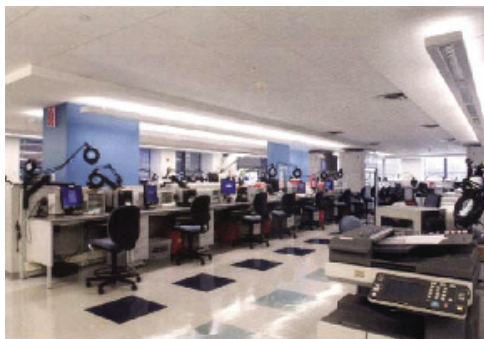
- * Lighting power will be reduced to at least 35% below industry standard.

- * Recycled building materials will be used from sunflower seeds, wheat, salvaged wood, recycled ceiling tiles, and recycled glass.

This new headquarters tops the list of impressive renovations and new constructions C.W. Brown has amassed across industries, including health care and education. (These markets in the New York State are forecast to grow 1% to 2% - a healthy growth rate in today's economy.) "When most companies in this industry were going in the opposite direction," said Charlie Brown. "We were exploring new possibilities."



Green Project - Manhattanville College



Pathology Lab - Bayer Laboratories