



Hunt Construction Services, Inc. - New partners and a new headquarters propel the company's growth

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By Carol Froehlig, correspondent Over the past seven years, I have interviewed David Hunt, president of Hunt Corporate Services, Inc. (Plainview) several times, the first time as he was piloting his airplane to Walkill, New York, to take aerial photographs for a new client. Each interview was a result of his firm being named Company of the Month by the New York Real Estate Journal.

Established in 1981, Hunt's firm has carved a very successful niche in exclusively representing Long Island companies for the acquisition and disposition of commercial real estate. Both the firm and David Hunt, individually, have been named as Top 20 Brokers by Real Estate Forum magazine and the Costar Group, one of the largest independent providers of commercial real estate information. Unlike traditional real estate brokers, however, Hunt works with clients only through exclusive contracts. His firm serves as an outsourced real estate department for an impressive array of Long Island companies.

Today, however, my interview is about a company formed only two years ago, Hunt Construction Services, Inc., which has been named Company of the Month by the New York Real Estate Journal. My meeting today will be with both David Hunt, president of the new construction company, and his two partners, Rob Ciurleo and Andy Haugen. Hunt Construction Services specializes in all phases of commercial construction in the metro area.

Haugen has recently joined the firm after a thirty-year career as owner and president of AMH Development.

I joined the three in their new headquarters in Plainview.

Two Years Old

CF: David, I love your new office. When did you move in?

Hunt: Almost a year ago. With the formation of the construction company, we were really pressed for space. With the economy the way it was, it could not have been a better time to strike a deal for new offices. We have a great location, favorable terms, and enough growth capability for years. And, of course, we did the construction of our own offices!

CF: So, David, the construction business is two years old. How is it going?

Hunt: We have had a wide variety of projects, and are receiving more and more opportunities to bid. We always believed that the high level of trust that we enjoy in the commercial real estate world would generate business on its own, and it has.

CF: How has the construction company affected your commercial consulting and brokerage operation?

Hunt: It has absolutely augmented the services that we can supply to our clients. On a regular basis, we are offering construction budgeting as part of our representation. A great example is a building that we recently sold to a developer who is new to Long Island. We recommended the property to

him, provided him with both market data and construction budgeting, negotiated and closed the deal for him. Since the closing, Hunt Construction has demolished the interiors, repaired a deteriorating exterior wall, and replaced warehouse windows with glass block. Soon we will be modernizing this 45 year old building by constructing an entirely new front exterior, as well as repaving and curbing the site. When the tenant has been secured, we will be building the interiors. One-stop shopping for our client!

CF: I'm wondering where you find new business in this economy. Aren't contractors going out of business?

Hunt: Well, yes, some are. Fortunately, most of our work is coming from our existing relationships. I have been involved with commercial real estate since 1973. That's a lot of transactions, and I like to think, a lot of good will! It has been gratifying to hear our existing clientele say, "You're on the bidding list," the moment I tell them we are offering construction services. Our client list is growing and we are doing more business off Long Island. While Hunt Corporate Services represents some very well-known names such as Progressive Insurance, PNC Bank out of Pittsburgh, and Swiss International Air, we also represent a much large number of smaller local companies.

CF: Can you give me an idea of some of the projects that you have completed or are underway?

Hunt: Let's see...we have built out the retail interior for Davis Vision, won a \$600,000 bid for custom cabinetry and installation with the City of New York, remodeled a four-story office building in New Hyde Park, replaced the exterior facade of an existing Consumer Kitchens and Bath in East Meadow, and renovated an industrial building, inside and out, on Lakeland Avenue in Ronkonkoma to get it ready for marketing. And of course, office tenant installations. So, a wide variety of challenges!

Andy Haugen

CF: Andy, tell me a little about your background.

Haugen: I earned my bachelor's degree at University of San Antonio, Texas, and as a student was a member of a home builders club. A local home builder, the largest in that part of Texas, took us to a home builder's convention in Chicago. I met a representative from Levitt & Sons at the convention, and they offered to fly me from San Antonio for a job interview.

It was a great opportunity: A three year training program with Levitt & Sons, at that time the biggest residential builder in the country. I was there for five years, and it was a tremendous learning experience. Things began to change radically when Levitt was bought out by IT&T. I had several associations after that, but the most influential was when I became executive vice president of PMA Realty. We managed, leased and built out over 40 commercial properties, and along the way created PMA Development Corp., a separate construction company. After four years, in 1981, I felt ready to move out on my own, and that is when I founded AMH Development Corp.

CF: So AMH Development was your own company. Tell me about some of the projects that AMH has built in the last thirty years.

Haugen: It's hard to remember all the projects over the last 30 years! We built many Jenny Craig and Wendy's franchises, and an office building on Veteran's Highway. And many car dealerships and service centers: the Roslyn Saab dealership, Cadillac-Hummer in Great Neck, Jeep-Chrysler in Levittown and most recently the new Miracle Mile Harley-Davidson at 1900 Northern Boulevard in Great Neck. Industrial, office, retail, shopping centers - I have done it all.

One of the most detailed jobs I handled was the Philips Plaza in Lynbrook, located at the corner of Sunrise Highway and Peninsula Boulevard. We demolished the old Rupp Chevrolet dealership and

service center. That was very detailed and careful work because there were adjoining structures. Then we built the shopping center with a under-building parking garage, and a freestanding Sterling Optical as well. We also installed sidewalks on both Sunrise Highway and Peninsula Blvd. It took a little over a year.

CF: I understand you retired from construction several months ago. How did David lure you out of retirement?

Haugen: There's only so much you can do around the house!

CF: So you missed the action...

Haugen: Yes, you could say I missed the action. But I didn't miss the administration. That's why David's offer made so much sense to me. He's handling the marketing, the paperwork, the insurance and the like. I get to build and continue relationships with my clients of many years, my favorite part.

Rob Ciurleo

CF: You are the youngest of the three partners. Tell me a little about your background.

Ciurleo: From a young age, I learned how to be handy with a hammer or trowel. I helped my father out on the weekends when he was almost always swinging a hammer for friends and family. I earned my four year degree at Stony Brook, as a commuter though, since I was always working during college.

Oddly enough, Andy and I have a connection. My brother, George, also worked for PMA Development, but he started about the time Andy left. And, while in college, I worked at PMA full-time during the summers in property maintenance. In 1987, there was a split in PMA Realty and the upshot was that my brother was offered a major maintenance contract to maintain all the Waldbaum's shopping centers on Long Island. He offered me a partnership and we created Plaza Realty Services. It was a great ride, and very educational. We handled many properties, but our primary tasks were property management and maintenance.

But my real love was general contracting, and with my brother's blessing, I left Plaza Realty in 2000 to get more experience in that arena.

CF: Tell me about some of your notable projects.

Ciurleo: My first big project was the complete interior demolition and renovation of a 30,000 s/f specialty supermarket. Other projects followed, the most complex of which was the ground-up construction of a four-story 44,000 s/f condominium complex in the heart of the village of Rockville Centre, N.Y. There was a lot of quality control - we were building out 32 individual apartments! I formed Real Estate Solutions, Inc. in the process, and our latest job was the complete interior demolition and renovation of a 100,000 s/f industrial building in Melville, N.Y., which included three turn-key tenant build-outs as well as site work.

It was good to find a home with David. While I enjoyed being self-employed, there was always the thought as to where the next job was coming from. I'm not a person who would leave one job in the eighth inning to start the next job.

CF: What do you see as the niche or strengths that Hunt can offer its clients?

Ciurleo: First and foremost, there is a level of trust that we will be doing the right job for our client, every time. David calls it a "trusted advisor" level of confidence. Second, Andy and I have supervised projects from multi-story ground-up construction to the simplest office renovation and everything in-between. We are able to handle almost any commercial project, and are offering both Construction Management and General Contracting services, depending on the client's needs.

Finally, David has built his real estate advisory company on the concept of an "out-sourced real estate department." We are looking to provide the same for our construction clients - their own "out-sourced construction and maintenance department."

CF: Is there any job that Hunt Constuction cannot do?

Ciurleo: With the three of us, and our great staff, absolutely not!

Beyond Business

CF: So, gentlemen, how do like working at Hunt Construction?

Haugen: I've only been here a short while, but so far everything is great. Everyone is going out of their way to get me settled and comfortable. And it's nice to have someone else worry about the administrative work!

Ciurleo: I love it. David is very relaxed but at the same time very professional. Very, very focused, with an urgency of getting things done, but very considerate of all the people in his life. As you might expect from an ordained minister! I have to tell you that I had no idea at the extent of David's volunteer work and outside activities before I joined Hunt Construction.

CF: David, I wanted to discuss that. You and your wife finished your two-year seminary program last summer. I saw your commencement speech at The Riverside Church in Manhattan on YouTube. Very impressive. Especially for a building contractor!

David: (Laughs) That was one of those peak life experiences. I was elected along with another student to be a commencement speaker out of our class of 83. There were supposedly 2,000 people at Riverside Church. My first sermon. It was surreal.

CF: Tell me about your ministry.

David: Judy and I are ordained interfaith ministers, so we can spiritually counsel and marry people from any and all faith traditions. But my real ministry is kids. As you may remember, I do a lot of counseling and coaching with youngsters. My seminary work absolutely gave me a lot of tools to help with that. And Judy is a certified life coach, which is a wonderful skill for a minister. I don't see a brick and mortar house of worship and a congregation in our future, but we take our ministry very seriously.

CF: Still working with Scouts?

David: Oh, yes. That is the majority of my work with youngsters. I am currently coaching 37 boys who are trying to achieve Eagle Scout rank, both in a group and individually. I am also an assistant scoutmaster with a Boy Scout troop in Centerport, as well as serving on the district advancement committee. Not to mention merit badge counseling! Scouting made a tremendous difference in my life when I was a youngster, and it is such a joy to give back.

CF: That is so commendable. I don't know where you can possibly find the time for all of it. Did your son finish with graduate school?

Hunt: Yes, Dr. Hunt (sorry, I can't resist) is now working at Lawrence Livermore Laboratories outside of San Francisco, doing geothermal research. Judy and I miss our son and daughter-in-law, and would love to have them closer to home, but email and the telephone keep us close. And we try to see them once or twice a year. They came home for Christmas. It was wonderful.

CF: Well, gentlemen, it certainly sounds like you have a solid plan for success. My best wishes to all three of you.

Hunt: Thank you, Carol. It is always a pleasure to talk with you.

After the interview, the words, "quiet professionalism" came to mind. I was impressed with energy,

knowledge and easy manner of all three partners. It was easy to see why their present and future business is based upon the confidence of their clientele.

Carol Froehlig is a freelance writer on Long Island.

New York Real Estate Journal - 17 Accord Park Drive #207, Norwell MA 02061 - (781) 878-4540