

Building on 60 Years

✚ Nibbi Brothers celebrates its 60th anniversary by constructing San Francisco's Exploratorium, a project that will serve future generations. *By Jamie Morgan*

"Certainly building a great quality building is important, but more important is building a long-standing relationship of trust and mutual respect."

> Joe Olla, director, business development



Nibbi Brothers' Exploratorium project involves waterfront construction, historic renovation and seismic retrofit.

Nibbi Brothers General Contractors

www.nibbi.com

Proj. 2011 revenue: \$160 million

Headquarters: San Francisco

Specialty: Preconstruction, construction and post-construction general contracting

Employees: 150

> **Though it just celebrated its 60th** anniversary as a general contractor, Nibbi Brothers General Contractors has not used the milestone as an excuse to slow down. In an industry where peers have closed its doors, downsized or suffered significant revenue decreases, Nibbi Brothers has maintained its annual revenue numbers from 2009 into 2010 and projects a \$60 million increase in

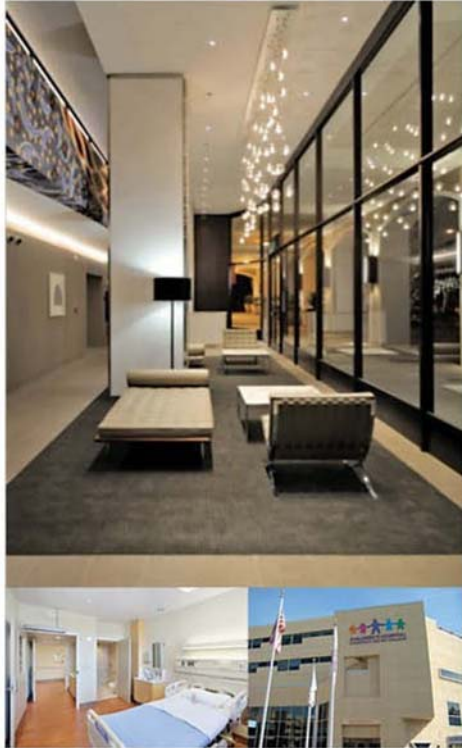
2011. In November 2010 alone, the company started construction on \$200 million worth of new projects.

"That's a great sign not only for us, but to the market, in terms of what we've been able to achieve," says Joe Olla, director of business development, who credits much of Nibbi's success to its expertise in building client relationships. He says about 85 percent of the company's work comes from repeat clients, many of whom are beckoning the company to work beyond the greater San Francisco Bay area. "Our client-focused set of services have enabled us to weather this storm," Olla says.

That client focus isn't just a gimmick to get through the recession; it's been an

integral part of Nibbi since its humble beginnings in 1950, when Marino Nibbi, an Italian immigrant, set up a carpentry shop in San Francisco. At first he pulled in only small jobs, but as one recommendation led to the next, soon his business was in such high demand that his brother, Pete, stepped in to help, thus forming the Nibbi Brothers General Contractors that exists today. Even now, two other Nibbi brothers, Bob and Michael, grandsons of Marino, share ownership of the company alongside CFO Rick Fedick and Chief Estimator John Kugler, two industry veterans.

"Our anniversary was not only a milestone in terms of number of years, it's a testament to our client-focused ap-



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proach, integrity as a business and family type atmosphere, which has enabled the company to get stronger throughout the generations,” Olla says.

Over the past decade or so, Nibbi has seen major changes to its business model. The company evolved from being a hard-bid general contractor to now performing virtually all of its work in a negotiated manner as a construction manager and general contractor. The only hard-bid jobs performed by the company are through its Nibbi Concrete division that was created in 2004. The concrete division provides structural concrete services for Nibbi’s general contracting entity as well as other owners, developers and general contractors. However, even when performing hard-bid work, Olla says the company always works with clients in a negotiated state of mind.

“We exist to build partnerships no matter the delivery method,” he says. “What Marino Nibbi did as far as building the business through word-of-mouth and relationships is what we stand for today, and that is, we are in the business of building buildings, but at the same time we are more importantly in the business of building relationships. I think that even when we were a hard-bid contractor, the previous generation had that as a priority.”

Those relationships include clients from all types of industries including multi-family housing developers, private education and hospitality. One of its recent projects, the Exploratorium, combines four of Nibbi’s core expertises – waterfront properties, cultural centers, historic restoration and seismic retrofit.

The Exploratorium, currently located at San Francisco’s Palace of Fine Arts, will be built at San Francisco’s Pier 15. The project also includes structural and underwater work at Pier 17 for future expansion. The world-famous museum, founded by Frank Oppenheimer in 1969, is known for its interactive exhibits that encourage exploration of science, art and human perception. It has long out-



Nibbi Brothers spent four years in design and preconstruction before breaking ground on the Exploratorium project.

grown its current space, even turning teachers away from the Exploratorium’s nationally recognized Teacher Institute.

The new building – five times larger than the current museum – will triple the Exploratorium’s capacity for teacher development and double its exhibition space and number of classrooms.

The Nibbi team along with Wilson Meany Sullivan, KPM Consulting, EHDD Architecture and Rutherford & Chekene, broke ground for the project in November 2010, but it has been in design and preconstruction for the past four years, with Nibbi playing an integral part.

“Due to the many projects we have built on the waterfront, we were able to bring a great deal of experience and understanding to the Exploratorium team,” Olla says. “We’ve performed similar work on the San Francisco waterfront in prior years, but over the past four years, having the opportunity to learn and understand the different aspects about the museum have been critical to the project’s success to date.”

The new Exploratorium museum will cover nine acres of waterfront property and also extend over the water. Early construction work has included replacing a beam that runs the length of Pier 17. In order to do so, the construction team lifted the entire building and removed the old beam to slide in a new one. Also, Nibbi is dredging and driving piles 160 feet deep underneath the bay to replace and/or repair and seismically upgrade 230 piles that will support the structure’s deck. On top of that deck will sit the new 230,000-square-foot Exploratorium, which will house the observatory addition, a theater, biology lab, outdoor terrace and public access areas.

For the interior space, Nibbi used a three-dimensional laser tool that scanned each part of the current Exploratorium’s interior to create a full 3-D model of the existing structure. That model has allowed the company to overlay existing exhibits with the new design in order to eliminate incongruities with the construction.

Another aspect of the project that had to be fully researched was the Exploratorium's decision to include a bay-water heating and cooling system. A thermal tank submerged beneath the bay will provide the necessary heating and cooling for the entire museum.

The thermal tank will help the Exploratorium's goal of becoming a net-zero energy building and LEED Gold certified. Sustainable plans for the \$140 million project include:

- » A 1.4 megawatt photovoltaic system on the roof;
- » Rain capturing system;
- » Waterless urinals;
- » Radiant floors; and
- » Advanced lighting controls.

Olla says the green properties are great in keeping with the Exploratorium's appreciation of science and nature.

The Green Forefront

Nine years ago, the USGBC and its LEED program were not as popular as they are today, but still the company saw value in them. Nibbi became a USGBC member and took steps to have its project management, preconstruction and estimating employees earn LEED accreditation.


After achieving that goal, the company created Nibbi Green, a committee of Nibbi staffers assembled to maximize the sustainable goals of the company. The mission of Nibbi Green is to advocate for environmental stewardship on all levels, focusing not only on the company's projects, but also individual actions. Nibbi works with clients to provide them with the tools and advice to make decisions about smart, short- and long-term sustainable investments.

Initiatives such as routine debris

diversion and recycling on jobsites, as well as unique benefits like flex-spending accounts for its employees to utilize public transportation are in place at Nibbi. It also has organized cleanup days at the beach, eliminated bottled water and publishes its corporate magazine on recycled materials with soy-based inks. The magazine includes articles for clients, architects and engineers about how to be green.

"We are sensitive about ensuring our green policies mean something and truly make a difference," Olla says.

"Our goal is simple," he continues. "We ensure our clients are pleased with our efforts. Certainly building a great quality building is important, but more important is building a long-standing relationship of trust and mutual respect through honesty and integrity." ■




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Progress Glass wishes to congratulate Nibbi Brothers on their 60th Anniversary. This milestone is quite an accomplishment! We look forward to working, in partnership, with Nibbi Brothers for another 60+ years.

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