

COMMUNITY PITCHES IN TO BUILD BALLPARK



E & J Rebar's Karen Miskavige owns one of several women-owned firms working on the new ballpark. On any given day at the ballpark site, E & J Rebar has more than two-dozen workers installing hundreds of yards of steel dowels, called rebar. Rebar reinforces the concrete that will eventually support the concourses and the entire ballpark structure.

If it sounds like a man's job, think again. The woman behind this work is Karen Miskavige, the owner and President of E & J Rebar.

"We're proud to be working on such a prestigious downtown landmark," said Miskavige, who has seen her small company double in size since its inception in 2003.

Miskavige owns one of several women-owned firms working on the new ballpark through Mortenson Construction's multi-faceted Community Participation Program.

"The program helps open the door for qualified companies and individuals who might not otherwise have the chance to work on the ballpark," Minnesota Ballpark Authority (MBA) Chair Steve Cramer said. "We are committed to assuring women, minorities and small business owners have opportunities. We're constantly monitoring their participation on the project."

In April of 2007, the MBA, Mortenson Construction, the Minnesota Twins and Hennepin County agreed to specific project goals for hiring subcontractors and suppliers as well as employing minorities and women. The MBA has a contract with the Minneapolis Department of Civil Rights to monitor the progress toward reaching those goals.

Lynn Littlejohn, Mortenson Construction's Director of Community Affairs, says the Small, Women, Minority Business Enterprise (SWMBE) goal for subcontractors and suppliers is 30%. So far, SWMBE participation is 32%, representing \$59 million of the \$187 million in contracts awarded.

"Mortenson believes in being a good community steward and involving the communities in which we work in our projects in a meaningful and significant way," Littlejohn said.

The ballpark project also has a workforce diversity goal of 25% minority and 5% female. Of the 89,000 recorded hours as of mid-February, the female rate (7%) has exceeded the goal while the minority rate (14%) has fallen short. Littlejohn says she expects the minority workforce numbers to go up this spring when



The MBA contracts with the Minneapolis Department of Civil Rights to track workforce diversity goals. the nature of work changes and the need for laborers increases.

Still, John Wood, Mortenson Construction's Senior Vice President, told the MBA Board on February 27th that he is "not content at all" with the minority workforce diversity numbers to date, and he pledged Mortenson's commitment to increase participation.

The MBA is contracting with the Metropolitan Economic Development Association (MEDA), Summit Academy Opportunities Industrialization Center (OIC) and the Minneapolis Urban League to assist Mortenson Construction in finding qualified minority workers and entrepreneurs.

"We are confident Mortenson is doing everything it can to reach these goals," Cramer said. "They feel, like we do, that the project won't be a complete success unless they are met."

Kathleen Meyer, owner and CEO of Meyer Contracting, is a minority owned subcontractor that worked on the ballpark project. Her 40-employee firm reconstructed the site's sanitary and storm sewer systems.

Meyer says the work wasn't easy. One weekend, she had two crews of six working twelve-hour shifts trying to reroute the ballpark's new sewer system. The work shut down the intersection of 2nd Avenue and 6th Street and the goal was to reopen the intersection before Monday morning's rush hour. Her dedicated crews completed the job in time with no complaints.

"This Community Participation Program recognizes the hard working firms - regardless of their size - and gives them a chance to make a pitch for business," said Meyer. "I'm proud to report that our crews completed their work on the project in December... ahead of schedule."

E & J Rebar still has a lot of work to do before calling it quits. Miskavige's crews will install more than 5,000 tons of rebar on the ballpark site when all is said and done.

She admits it's a huge job for a firm her size, but she's up for the challenge and thankful for the opportunity.

"This program gives women-owned businesses like mine an opportunity to compete in the marketplace," Miskavige said. "And it allows our skilled workforce a chance to shine."