

MEET MBA PROJECT MANAGER ED HUNTER



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As the new ballpark takes physical shape, it can be easy to forget that its construction team includes many people who've never welded a beam or placed a yard of concrete. Instead, these folks attend countless meetings, avert crises, and manage a million unseen details. MBA Project Manager Ed Hunter, however, has worn several hats, and his plainspoken presence has been part of the project since September 2006. Hunter's experiences range from an early stint as a licensed electrician, to the position of project director of Minnesota's biggest public works project of this generation, the construction of the Hiawatha LRT line. He also came to Minneapolis knowing a thing or two about ballparks, having played key roles in the public agency that built Safeco Field in Seattle.

A native of Missouri, Hunter earned his Building Construction and Architecture degrees from the University of Washington. After graduating in the mid-1980s, he cut his teeth on one of Seattle's largest public projects, the building of downtown's 1.3-mile underground bus tunnel. Hired as an inspector, Hunter spent two years pulling overtime in an 80'- deep trench that cut through the heart of Seattle's retail district. The experience left him with a lasting enthusiasm for massive projects of enormous complexity. "For a green kid out of college, it was an eye-opener, and a great experience," he recalls. Amazingly, after just two years on the job, he was put in charge of construction of the tunnel's most prominent station. Hunter attributes this meteoric rise to a combination of luck, good mentorship, and a can-do attitude that was a legacy from his father. "My dad grew up without a father in the Depression, and he learned to fix anything and everything . . . because they just didn't have the money to buy new." Hunter says. "He would try to tackle anything. And that was the way I was raised."

After the tunnel, Hunter worked on several other large public and private projects, including the \$1 Billion Boeing 777 plant expansion in Everett WA, before signing on to Safeco Field in 1997. Then, in early 2001 he received a call from Metro Transit. Five years later, with the Hiawatha LRT line having been completed under budget and a month ahead of schedule, Hunter was tapped to help manage the new Twins ballpark project. For this baseball lover, the chance to work on a second ballpark was "icing on the cake."

Counting Beans and Herding Cats

When asked what makes for a good project manager, Hunter offers a characteristically wry response. "In my role you don't have to know all of the details as much as you need to be able to herd cats," he says. MBA Executive Director Dan Kenney agrees, but uses a different metaphor. "Half of [the project manager's job] is firefighter; half is arsonist," says Kenney, "because sometimes you need to light a fire under somebody . . . and other times, you need to solve all kinds of problems that arise. And Ed is very, very good at that constant juggling act." According to Kenney, Hunter's extensive background in rail transit is also invaluable, given the complexities of building the ballpark's connections with the Northstar and Hiawatha lines.

Charged with managing the finite resource that is the MBA's \$105 million infrastructure budget, Hunter also spends much of his time keeping a hawk-like eye trained on the ballpark's bottom line. While the buck may not stop with him, it doesn't go anywhere without his approval. "One of my primary responsibilities is to look out after the public dollars to make sure that they're being wisely spent and that we're getting good value," he explains. To do that, he must maintain a close working knowledge of every aspect of the project, both on site and off.

Still, it's clear that Hunter does much more than bird dog and count beans. Early on, when everyone was struggling to design the ballpark to fit into its small site, it was Hunter who suggested approaching the BNSF Railroad about moving its tracks to the west to gain the necessary space. "They all kind of looked at me like I'd fallen off the turnip truck," he recalls. Yet just seven months later—lightning speed by any measure, but especially on a railroad's timetable—a deal had been struck and relocation of the tracks was underway.

According to Dan Kenney, the outcome was good for everyone, resulting in an expanded service level for the ballpark, a better configuration of BNSF's service corridor, and room for a future Cedar Lake bike trail connection. "That's what's fun about this kind of job," says Hunter, "taking a situation like that and pulling something out of thin air."

Many years after he first climbed into that big trench in downtown Seattle, Hunter still takes enormous pride and satisfaction in being part of large-scale efforts that build the public realm. As he puts it, "It's a great feeling to work on projects that someday my kids can look at and say 'my dad helped build that.'"