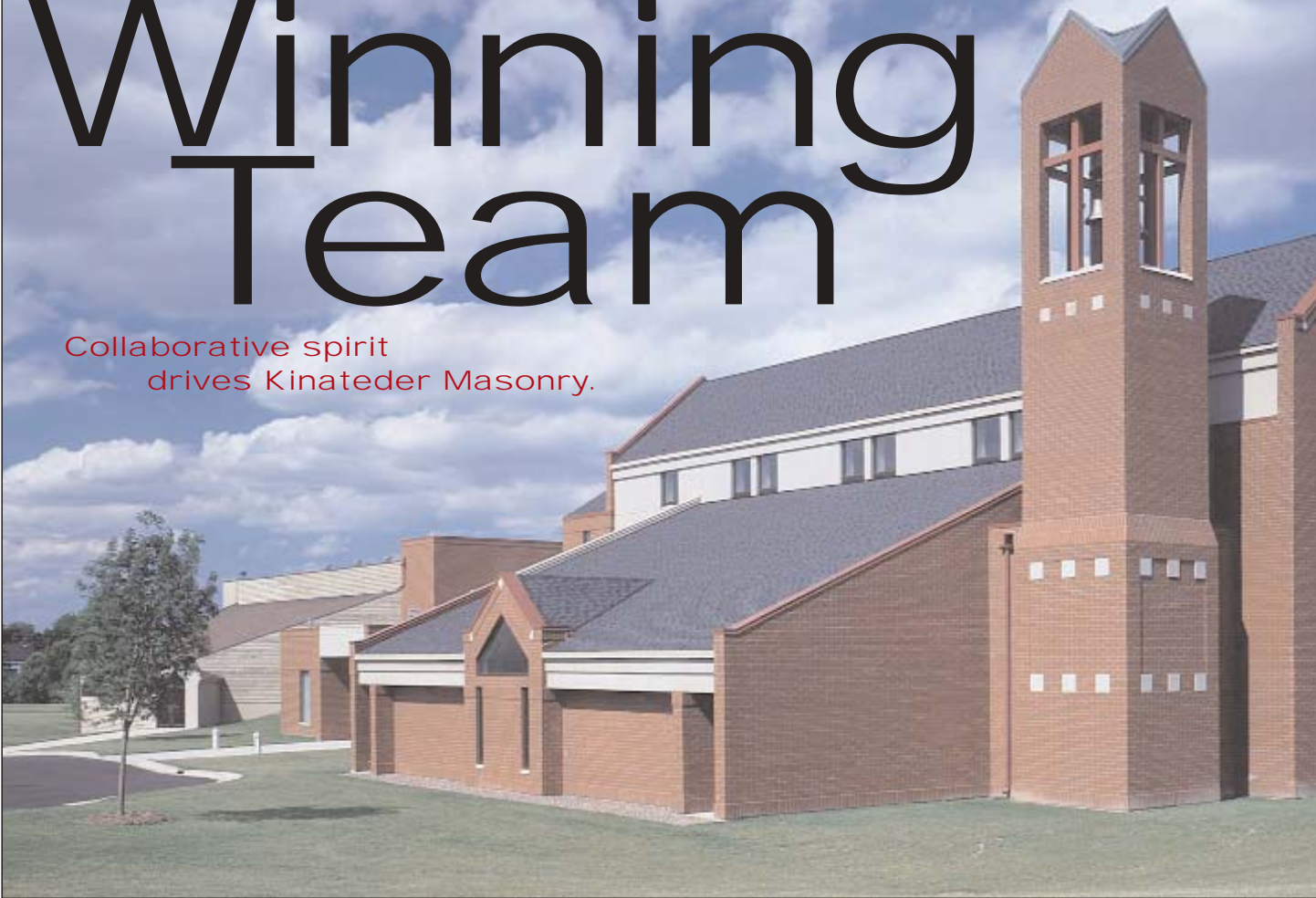


A Winning Team

Collaborative spirit
drives Kinateder Masonry.



Teamwork is an integral value in the success of Fred Kinateder Masonry Inc., and this concept means partnering both internally and externally, according to Fred Kinateder, founder and president of the Waukesha, Wis.-based firm.

“One of our biggest strengths is the working relationship between the office staff and the field people,” said Kinateder, whose company ranked #25 in MASONRY CONSTRUCTION’s “Top Contractors” of 2002 list (see article on page 29). “In some companies, there is an adversarial relationship between the two. We have made a distinct effort not to let that

happen.

“For example,” he continued, “by the time a job is handed off to the field staff the office personnel have made sure all questions are answered and all design points are documented. If we get a job that requires three different kinds of brick, we go through the plan and do a color scheme on the drawing that highlights where each type goes. The foreman does not have to figure it out while 10 guys are waiting around.”

That same spirit of cooperation also is expected to carry through to interactions with other members of the project team. “We stress to our employees that teamwork has to go beyond Kinateder Masonry to help the general contractor

and the construction manager meet their commitments to the owners,” he added. “Contractors like to have us on their jobs for that reason.”

Kinateder Masonry’s commitment to completing each project on time, within budget, in a collaborative manner has kept the company on its fast growth path. Since its inception in 1990, the company has become southeast Wisconsin’s largest masonry contractor.

An early beginning

Fred Kinateder started out as a laborer in the summer while in high school, and quickly learned that he liked the work and the business. While employed by Bundy Masonry, New Berlin, Wis., owner



Clarence Bundy promoted him into estimating. Kinateder worked in that area on and off for about 10 years. Bundy decided to retire and considered selling his assets, so Kinateder pulled his finances together with plans to purchase the company. Ultimately, the owner decided not to sell.

With the financing already in place, Kinateder determined that it was – as he put it – “time to take the plunge.” He teamed up with a coworker, John Zahares, to form the partnership in 1990.

The timing was right and Kinateder knew the market well. “There was pent-up demand,” he remembered. “Bundy Masonry was busy, and two years earlier the owner of one of its largest competitors retired, which left a gap in the marketplace.”

Kinateder started out cautiously by bidding work on his own. Once he landed that first job, Zahares, who is now vice president of field operations, came aboard, along with Charlie Folts, who today is the company’s safety director. They hired a few bricklayers from the union hall and the business took off. Annual sales are now over \$17 million and the local market has the capacity for further expansion.

Managing growth

Growth came fast, but was always kept under control. “We were careful about what projects we bid,” stated Kinateder, “and made sure that we would make money and have a certain comfort level on each job. Early in our history

there were some large projects that general contractors wanted the company to bid, but we passed them by until we could build up our workforce to the level needed.”

In 1992 Kinateder Masonry took on its largest job up to that point – the \$3.6 million Waukesha West High School. That pivotal job helped establish the company’s reputation for successfully executing major projects. By the late 1990s, the company was handling major work such as Miller Park, home of baseball’s Milwaukee Brewers, where crews placed 450,000 block and installed decorative stonework.

Today, the union contractor performs all types of new and add-on masonry construction, from large commercial and industrial work to small service contracts. Schools are an important market for the company, which built monuments for Marquette University in Milwaukee and installed elaborately detailed masonry designs for Wisconsin Lutheran College, also in Milwaukee.

“We have a number of good stone-masons on our staff,” said Kinateder. “Some architects think it’s a lost art, but we take pride in the stonework we do.”

Ensuring a fair wage for his skilled craftsmen is one reason why Kinateder chose to be a union contractor. “We expect the masons to work hard and want them to be well-compensated so that their families can enjoy a comfortable life and they can retire with a decent pension,” he emphasized.

Another benefit of operating a union shop, according to Kinateder, is the creation of a level playing field. “I know what my competitors’ wage package is,” he explained. “It gives us the edge if we can figure out a better way to do the work. And that’s one of the areas that we are good at – finding ways to be more productive.”

Protecting resources

A good safety program is an important investment to keep employees healthy and productive. “Our workers are a key resource,” emphasized the contractor. “Everyone benefits by protecting his/her family life and future earning power. And the program also goes a long way with general contractors who want to make sure that you have a safe worksite.” Full-time safety director Folts oversees Kinateder Masonry’s program, which fea-

Above left: Fred Kinateder Masonry’s work at St. Elizabeth Anne Seton Catholic Church included the installation of a CMU backup and modular brick veneer with buff Indiana limestone accents.

Fred Kinateder believes that a partnering relationship between the company’s office staff and field people, and the contractor’s personnel and other members of the project team, is essential to a successful operation.



tures quarterly training, weekly toolbox talks, breakfast meetings with guest presenters, employee incentives, and seasonal safety reminders inserted in paycheck envelopes.

Kinateder is firmly committed to nurturing a skilled workforce by training employees, compensating them well, and keeping them safe. When it comes to the widely bemoaned labor shortages, however, he is skeptical. "There's a perception throughout the general contracting and construction management community that we have this huge shortage of craftspeople," he stated. "In our area, there were times in the last few years when the company was operating at peak levels, but I have never been involved in a job that wasn't completed on time and within budget. It's a matter of knowing how to make use of your resources."

In a common scenario, Kinateder noted, a project encounters delays and the general contractor seeks to make up time by

suddenly calling for 30 bricklayers when he has only enough work ready for 5. "I'd rather go in at the scoping phase and say, 'tell me what you need done and I'll work from there to accomplish it.' Then we break the job down according to areas and needs, and man it accordingly," he stressed. Conversely, if the general contractor asks him to provide a certain number of bricklayers and foremen, Kinateder will specify what he needs from the GC to keep the workers productive.

"It's up to the masonry contractor to understand the workflow and how it can get nonproductive in a hurry," he commented. "There are only so many pieces going into the wall, and that's what we are paid to produce. The more people I put on the job, the lower their individual production."

Another concern of Kinateder is a shrinking market share for masonry, despite his conviction that the product is still the material of preference. "It's a

matter of price," he continued. "We need to educate owners that a cheaper front-end price does not necessarily mean a lower life cycle cost for the building." The International Masonry Institute's Wisconsin chapter, of which Kinateder is chairman, is active in marketing the benefits of masonry to owners and other members of the design team.

It is evident that Kinateder carries his teamwork philosophy through to the industry as a whole. "I believe it's necessary to stay involved," he asserted. He serves on several committees for the Wisconsin IMI, and on the Board of Trustees for the national IMI. He also is a member of the Mason Contractors Association of America and vice president of MCA Milwaukee. He is vice president of the International Council of Employers of Bricklayers and Allied Craftworkers and secretary/treasurer of the Allied Construction Employers Association of Milwaukee.