

Thoughtful Planners

LIVE OAK'S WORK HAS LED TO LONG-STANDING RELATIONSHIPS WITH CLIENTS AND SUBS. BY JIM HARRIS

Live Oak Contracting anticipates contracting more than \$100 million worth of projects this year, up from its 2015 total of \$79 million. What makes that increase and the Jacksonville, Fla.-based general contractor's overall ability to secure projects even more impressive is the fact that 2016 is only its third full year in business.

Company Founder and President Paul Bertozzi attributes its rapid rise to the relationships it has with clients, vendors and subcontractors, many of whom he has worked with for much of his 15-year-long career. "Being engaged in the multifamily industry, understanding it and having the relationships we have has given us an edge in our market," he says. "Everything we do is relationship-driven."

The company's involvement on projects frequently begins during the conceptual and preconstruction stages. "We work with our clients from design development and are a part of the project team early on," Bertozzi adds.

Many of the company's projects come from repeat clients. "We don't bid every job that's out there," he says. "We have a good group of clients that keep us busy. We have a great pipeline of projects and work with a great group of developers who are active in the multifamily market and continue to engage us in their projects."

Live Oak Contracting

www.liveoakcontracting.com

- **Revenues:** \$76 million
- **Headquarters:** Jacksonville, Fla.
- **Employees:** 25
- **Specialty:** Multifamily construction
"Everything we do is relationship-driven."

— Paul Bertozzi, founder and president



» To create a resort-like community, Solana on Rivers offers a clubhouse, pool and cabanas.



One of Live Oak's regular development partners is Middle Street Partners, whose owners Adam Monroe and Ryan Knapp played a critical role in its founding in 2014. Monroe and Knapp approached Bertozzi about starting his own company as he was beginning work on one of their projects, Rivers Walk Apartments in Mount Pleasant, S.C. That project was the first of several

projects that Bertozzi would completed for Middle Street Partners and others. Monroe and Knapp became equity partners in Live Oak following Rivers Walk Apartments Phase 1 in 2013 and now Phase 2 in 2016.

Resort-Style Living

Live Oak began work in November 2015 on one of its latest projects for Middle Street

Partners. Construction on Solana On Rivers, a \$19 million apartment complex in North Charleston, S.C., is slated to conclude in early 2017.

Utility rough-in on the complex's two four-story apartment buildings are now underway. Both wood-frame buildings were topped out this spring.

Solana on Rivers will be a gated community with 202 units in the two buildings. The site also includes a clubhouse and three garage buildings. The three buildings are situated close to each other, creating a courtyard in their center. The courtyard includes grilling areas, a resort-style pool with cabanas. The apartment buildings also include covered loggias with flat screen TVs that open into the courtyard. These areas are supported and spanned by structural steel framing.

The garages are placed at the front of the site nearest a major city road, creating a buffer for the property that separates it from the street.

"This area was designed to create a



» Live Oak's executive team includes (clockwise from top), Joe Pattison, Katherine Ruttell and Paul Bertozzi.



resort-style feel with the community," Bertozzi explains. "This site was very well thought-out and planned."

Live Oak worked closely with Middle

Street Partners, architect Humphreys & Partners and Sitecast Civil Engineering during the project's early planning stages to identify and overcome significant project challenges including a high water table. The company imported structural fill materials to the site and used post-tension foundations to eliminate the need for deep footings that would potentially create additional challenges.

The Solana on Rivers buildings are also designed to withstand earthquakes, as the community is near a fault line. "Typically on coastal projects, communities are just

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designed to withstand uplifts from hurricanes, but we've also used a lot of shear wall to accommodate for seismic conditions," Bertozzi says. The complex also includes bracing for hanging water pipes, water heaters and other essential building elements.

Live Oak worked closely with project engineers Sitecast to plan for water, sewer and electrical utility access to the property. The largest water main near the site was a 24-inch main located across the near-by six-lane divided highway. Other options included a 10-inch water main that would not be able to supply a sufficient amount of water to the buildings' fourth floors.

The company ultimately worked with Charleston Water Service to create a water loop that tapped into the 10-inch water main as well as another line adjacent to the site. A booster pump was used to increase the water pressure to the apartments.

Live Oak has extensive prior experience with many of the sub-contractors on the project. "We have a great group of subs we do repeat business with, from the framers to electrical contractors to fire sprinkler installers," Bertozzi says. "They perform very well for us and know how to perform within the markets we serve.

"Everybody we work with is an integral part of the team; we know we can't perform our projects alone," he adds.

Busy in Old Saybrook

Live Oak and its project partners are also hard at work on Post at Main, a \$24.8 million, Class A apartment community in Old Say-

brook, Conn. "Now is one of the busiest times we've had on the job," Bertozzi explains, noting that roughly 300 construction personnel are on site.

The community's eight apartment buildings are in various stages of completion including electrical and plumbing rough-ins, framing and site work. Each of the buildings at Post at Main are three stories and contains 24 units. The buildings feature wood frames with stone facades and vinyl siding.

In addition to the eight buildings, the complex includes a clubhouse building with an Internet cafe, a resort-style pool and a fitness facility with shower areas. Portions of the clubhouse can also be opened directly onto the outdoor pool area through the use of four sliding panel doors. The site also includes a dog park with a pet washing station and a walking trail. Post at Main is located near Saybrook Station, a train station located on a train line that runs from Boston to New York City, Bertozzi notes.

The buildings' trusses are designed with multiple pitch heights that enable units to retain high ceilings while meeting the city's maximum height requirement of 60 feet above sea level. Each building is 37.5 feet high at its ridge and includes nine-foot high ceilings on the first and second floors, with vaulted ceilings of similar height on the third floor. The pitch of the roof changes in various places, he adds.

One challenge faced on the project was the absence of a sewer connection. Live Oak and property owner GM Saybrook are awaiting final approval from the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection for a large 20-foot-deep septic system to serve the site. "Creating a sanitary system for an entire project is definitely unusual, but we've spent a lot of time working through that on the state and local level," Bertozzi says. "Other than that, this job has gone very well for us, and we have a good group of subs in this market who have performed very well for us."

Beyond Residential

Bertozzi's construction industry experience includes serving as co-owner and operator of a successful multifamily turnkey renovation company in Jacksonville, where he started his career. In 2005, he began working with Summit Contractors Group as an assistant superintendent and project manager. While there, he helped establish two partnerships, Summit Contracting Services and Southeast Coastal Drywall. He has also worked as an estimator, business development manager and division manager.

Bertozzi continues to build on the experience positive reputation he has gained during his career. One of his goals is to further diversify the company's projects beyond the multifamily commercial sector. Live Oak also performs commercial sector tenant improvement projects including industrial construction. The company recently hired a senior project manager to manage its relationships with commercial clients. Ongoing commercial projects include a 45,000-square-foot office/warehouse space build, a fitness facility and a church sanctuary, all located in Jacksonville.

"The multifamily market is a great market and very active right now, but we know that can't last forever," Bertozzi says. ♦



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