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# CONCRETE CONTRACTOR

Helping Contractors Manage the Business of Concrete

## Tackling the Tough Stuff

Elliot Construction has a reputation as a contractor who can build anything with concrete





# Tackling the Tough Stuff

**Elliot Construction Corp.'s 'no fear' attitude toward concrete, paired with experienced crews and a dedication to customer service, has given the company a reputation throughout the Chicagoland area as a contractor who can build anything with concrete.**

Rob Elliot started Elliot Construction Corp., Glen Ellyn, Ill., in 1955 building basements and performing concrete work for a handful of homebuilders. Over the years, the company built a strong base of customers, at its residential height performing 15 to 20 basements a week. Starting in the 1980s, Elliot Construction began a gradual shift into the commercial and industrial sectors, taking on gas station projects and other light commercial work.

As competition for these projects grew, Elliot Construction turned away from the simple jobs and sought out the difficult projects less experienced contractors shied away from. Today the company specializes in all phases of concrete work, focusing on unique and technical commercial and industrial projects and extremely high-end residential homes. It also self-performs excavating and offers decorative concrete.

In today's tough economy, Elliot Construction relies on diversification and expertise to stay successful. The company is a preferred vendor for a number of corporate accounts

across a broad range of industries. Paul Nielsen, vice president of Elliot Construction, says having relationships with a lot of these companies helps the business in an economic downturn like the one we're facing today. While some sectors might be lagging, like hotel and retail, others sectors like industrial food production facilities and communications are strong and looking to expand, he explains.

Elliot Construction's expertise in out-of-the-ordinary concrete construction has made the company a valuable resource for general contractors, bucking a common trend in a tight economy where price trumps a company's reputation. "We have a lot of clients, even architectural firms, who come to us with a concrete design and say 'How will this work?' We are known for solving problems and building complicated structures," says CEO and founder Rob Elliot.

## Not your ordinary concrete

With an expertise in niche concrete projects comes the opportunity to build some unique and interesting projects. Residential homes in the \$10 million and up range often include two-story garages, in-home batting cages

**"If you look at the industry like a baseball team, we have the same bats and same gloves as other companies, but we have better players in the field."**

and lower-level sport courts. And Elliot Construction is known throughout the Midwest for its experience in water park construction, having worked on about 30 of these facilities.

At the Chicago Botanical Gardens, Elliot Construction performed all the concrete work, including footings, foundations, walkways, decorative concrete and black polished concrete floors. At the newly opened Holocaust

Museum in Skokie, Ill., the company completed all the concrete work at the facility, including a unique roof - because the building stands next to an expressway, the barrel roof with hitched gables has a concrete topping to reduce sound transmission. Elliot Construction was also involved with several million dollars worth of concrete work in downtown Chicago's Millennium Park, including planters, walkways, stairs and an intricate concrete bridge that was ultimately finished in stainless steel. At the Sears Centre, a facility that houses a 20,000-square-foot minor league hockey rink,





Elliot Construction poured the ice rink floor in one shot with very tight specifications.

"It's kind of neat to have your name associated with those projects," Elliot says. "But you better perform or your name is 'mud'."

*Right:* Elliot Construction's management team includes, left to right, President Dan Hagen, Vice President Paul Nielsen, and founder and CEO Rob Elliot.

*Below:* Rob Elliot, CEO and founder of Elliot Construction, says his company's success stems from his hard-working and dedicated employees.



## AT A GLANCE

**Company:**

Elliot Construction Corporation, Glen Ellyn, Ill.

**CEO & Founder:** Rob Elliot

**President:** Dan Hagen

**Vice President:** Paul Nielsen

**Employees:** 140

**Founded:** 1955

**2008 Gross annual sales:** \$25 million

**Services offered:**

All facets of concrete work on commercial, industrial and high-end residential projects; excavation and site work; decorative concrete.

**Key products and equipment:**

Ford trucks; National cranes; forms by Symons and Western Forms; trowels by Bartell-Morrison and Allen Engineering; earthmoving equipment from Case and Takeuchi; Stego Wrap; decorative concrete supplies from Butterfield Color & L.M. Scofield; Vibra-Strike screeds; Somera Copperhead Laser Screed; Soli-Cut saws; Ingersoll Rand air compressors; Wacker Neuson roller compactor; Terex concrete buggies; Schwing pumps; Putzmeister conveyors.





## Cover Story

### Servicing area contractors

In the 1990s, Elliot Construction Corp. saw a need to bring concrete placing into its business model. The company recognized the opportunities and now owns two placing businesses, one offering concrete pumps and another with conveyor-style placing equipment for concrete, sand and gravel.

Paul Nielsen, vice president says access is the main issue to consider when deciding to send a pump or a conveyor to the jobsite. "They're two different tools," he explains. "Typically with an open excavation, as long as it can be reached by a conveyor we use a conveyor. When you need to get concrete up to a second or third floor, we use a pump. We also use a pump for indoor jobs when we cannot get equipment inside or when we're pouring a radiant heat slab. Harsh or dry mixes can be easier for a conveyor, but when it comes to the harsh/dry mixes used for DOT bridge work, a contractor would choose a pump."-R.W.

#### Dedicated to its employees

Elliot gives his employees the credit for his company's success. There are several second-generation employees working at Elliot Construction, and the company has found many of its leaders in laborers who worked their way up the company ranks, including vice president Paul Nielsen who began as a laborer for the company in 1972.

"The company's success is based on outstanding employees," Elliot says.

"That's why I still work. Employees

have built the name of Elliot Construction and I want to do all I can to keep them employed. And, work is still fun for me."

"What helps us stand out is what we have that none of these other companies have - our people," says Dan Hagen, president. "If you look at the industry like a baseball team, we have the same bats and same gloves as other companies, but we have better players in the field."

Elliot has seen his company



Unique, difficult projects are Elliot Construction Corp.'s forte. The company has completed work on about 30 waterparks throughout the Midwest, and performed work in Chicagoland destinations such as the bridge at Millennium Park (top) and domes at the Morton Arboretum Children's Garden (bottom).



Elliot Construction Corp. often takes on high-level residential projects where it's not unheard of for the company to perform over \$1 million of concrete work. These large-scale homes, often with built-in batting cages and underground garages, are typically run by a general contractor like a commercial project rather than your typical residential build.

transform from a small business where he performed bidding and management operations in the evenings and ran his crews during the day. He remembers the fear he had in hiring his first foreman to take over some of the jobsite duties, but today Elliot has a large team of people he has entrusted to carry out his vision and take over the company in the coming years.

"I'm very pleased to have succession in place with Dan and Paul and other young people in the company. The work is still in my blood, and that's why I still come into the office; but I'm calm and comfortable with the dedication we have in place to take over when I'm finally golfing," Elliot says. "It's a good feeling when you put your whole life into something knowing it will continue with your same goals in mind." ~