

SCI Infrastructure

The Big Business Bang

Full-Service GC Adapts for Success in Seattle

By Jason Morgan

As the United Nations headquarters was officially opening in New York City, the Korean War continued and “I Love Lucy” premiered on CBS, Armondo Scoccolo and his brother founded Scoccolo Brothers Excavating in 1951 in Seattle.

From this two-man band, the company grew and Armondo was lured into working on public projects, while his brother maintained a one-man excavation show until his retirement. With that decision, Armondo formed Scoccolo Construction in 1959. When Armondo passed ownership to his two sons, Mark and Patrick, Scoccolo Construction became SCI Infrastructure LLC.

In the beginning, the goal was simple — to provide high-quality finishing services to large public contractors. Today, the company has an average of 190 employees, which usually spikes to more than 240 employees in the summer, and in addition to grading work, it combines its earthwork operations with underground “wet” utility installation such as storm sewers, water distribution systems and sanitary sewers. SCI Infrastructure employs a full-service utility division to handle road and site projects.

“We view utility work as an integral part of the earthwork on a site,” says Mark Scoccolo, SCI Infrastructure manager. “By performing both grading and utility work, we give the client one less subcontractor to coordinate with. It also eliminates the question of who is responsible for compacting soil throughout the site.”

Although its methods have changed, SCI Infrastructure’s goal has not. It still strives to provide expertise and value to its clients, while maintaining its commitment to

provide a safe work place for employees and quality workmanship for its customers.

“Fundamental principles of integrity and fair treatment never go out of style. Our industry memorializes everything with contracts. In reality, if you have a problem with a client where you end up having to read the fine print of the contract, you’ve already lost the battle,” says Scoccolo. “Our company doesn’t need to be the biggest firm in the area, we just want to be one of the best.”

Adapting to Climates

SCI Infrastructure started out with four employees, with Armondo working out in the field with them day in and day out. As the years passed, Armondo began supervising the jobs, instead of working on them. Armondo continued to grow his company through public works projects, while building a work ethic and family-like atmosphere among his employees.

The firm’s primary work was screening and placing topsoil on the side slopes of regional freeways. The crews fixed imperfections and cleaned out the ditches. Then they would hydro-seed the slopes, so grass would grow on them. The clients were thrilled with the finished results — a groomed, grassy slope — which would give the Scoccolos their reputation for attention to detail and the finished product.

Change came in the 1970s, when the Federal Highway Program shifted highway building to State Highway Departments, eliminating the topsoil placing and seeding foundation of the Scoccolo enterprise. While the change could have meant certain doom to some companies,



By performing both grading and utility work, SCI gives clients one less subcontractor to coordinate with. This also eliminates the question of who is responsible for compacting soil throughout the site.

Armondo opted to adapt to the change. So, SCI became a full service general contractor, and it began bidding against its former clients.

“It took some time, but we carved out our own market and grew as the local market permitted,” says Scoccolo. “We have had good times and lean times, but regardless of the economic climate, we never stopped providing honest service and good value to customers.”

In the past 10 years, SCI Infrastructure has seen significant growth by cultivating the local market and private client base to ensure it had repeat business. Last year, its gross sales jumped from \$30 million to \$55 million in just 12 months due to a spike in both the public and private markets. This boom led to SCI restructuring its company to accommodate to its success. It recently built a new office and shop facility that provides administrative and maintenance staff with a new, dynamic environment.

“Our staff gave a heroic effort to grow that fast and maintain profitability, but we’re committed to serving our private clients. When they have a large work load, so do we,” Scoccolo says.

To handle the influx in business, SCI Infrastructure employs an extensive fleet of utility equipment and earthmoving gear, ranging from hydraulic excavators to automatic grade trimmers. Ground conditions in the Seattle area vary greatly, so knowledge of the subsurface conditions is paramount to a job’s success. Most of the utility work SCI Infrastructure performs calls for the open-cut method, although some piping is installed with the boring and jacking method.

With massive equipment, varying jobsite conditions and a seemingly endless to-do list, SCI knows the important role safety plays on the jobsite. To reinforce safe work habits, it offers incentive programs that reward employees for safe operations with company hats, jackets and safety awards, along with education and training that sets the safety bar.

“Safety is a culture in a company. Sound work habits are the key to safe operations. Set expectations high for all your employees and new employees will either meet those expectations or be obvious stand-outs,” says Scoccolo. “We also hand out game-cards from a program called “Safety-Jackpot” that provides weekly recognition for safe work habits.”

The Bright Outlook

Several years after joining the Utility Contractors Association of Washington (UCAW) in 1998, SCI Infrastructure joined the national association. Being associated with NUCA has allowed SCI more exposure to new products, proven and improved installation methods and access to new equipment specific to the underground utility industry. SCI knows that being



Scoccolo Construction became SCI Infrastructure when Armondo Scoccolo (left) passed ownership to his two sons, Mark (center) and Patrick. Mark’s wife Jennifer (right) also works for the company.

knowledgeable about its business and capabilities of the latest technology helps it better serve its clients.

Mark Scoccolo is now the president of UCAW. Additionally, at least four employees play an active role in chapter activities, participating in both the scholarship committee and the safety committee. Mark’s brother Patrick helps organize the UCAW’s annual golf tournament and his wife Jennifer provides assistance with its annual benefit auction.

“As with most associations, the more you put into [NUCA], the more value you’ll receive from it. We have learned about new buried utility protection methods and heard valuable tips on dealing with trouble spots from other NUCA members,” says Scoccolo. “Every year, our staff looks forward to attending [Utility Construction] EXPO.”

With NUCA resources at its fingertips and a booming business, SCI hopes to bring the utility and infrastructure construction market in the Pacific Northwest up to snuff and give everyone in the rest of the country a run for their money.

Jason Morgan is assistant editor of *Utility Contractor*.