

US DEVELOPERS JOURNAL

WINTER 2010

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**NORTH COUNTRY CONCRETE
POURING EXPERIENCE INTO NEW DIRECTIONS**

THE MAGAZINE FOR CONSTRUCTION EXECUTIVES

Pouring Experience into New Directions

Produced by Victor Martins & Written by Michael H. Babcock

A decade of experience, hard work, quality and honesty were the building blocks for Karl Virkus as he started North Country Concrete, Inc. (NCCI) in 1996.

“If I was going to work night and day and all the weekends, I might as well do it on my own,” Virkus says of his decision to go on his own. “At first we were just busy; I did a lot of fabricating myself, building trucks and forms for the curb machines. I was sleeping in a chair at night.”

Virkus started working out of his home, taking on whatever projects he could find to build a base, and now 15 years later Virkus’ work has turned NCCI into one of the top companies in the Twin Cities-Minnesota metropolitan area.

Originally taking on projects that ranged from \$5,000 to \$100,000, NCCI’s business is now highlighted by projects that reach well over \$1 million, and the



60-employee company brings in around \$10 million to \$12 million in annual revenue.

Building Up Before Building Out

Things started to fall into place for Virkus and North Country in the late 1990s, including a facility encompassing an office and a shop that was built in 1999 in the Twin Cities suburb of Ramsey.

“We felt like it was time to get something of our own, something we could call home,” Virkus explains. “That’s why we expanded, and built our own building.” With a 48- x 46-foot office and an 80- x 56-foot shop built on a 2.5 acre plot of land, the building offers all the amenities needed to keep NCCI growing.

The staff expanded with the new location as well, including 10 people in the office, a full-time mechanic and around 50 to 60 field workers.

“We have two field superintendents and eight crews,” Virkus says. The crews are split by expertise, including niche crews that focus on steps and walls, colored stamping, the “fancier” work.

While making sure the work is done to fit the high standards NCCI was built on, Virkus also has focused on

keeping his employees safe. “All of our guys are OSHA 10 or better, with many of them being OSHA 30,” Virkus says, mentioning the use of local unions for training. “We use the cement mason, operating engineers and laborers. They offer a lot of programs for the members to utilize in the winter months.”

Laying a Foundation for the Future

Virkus says a lot of his work depends on the relations built from the quality work of the past. “We worked with Weis Construction, Minnesota Roadways, Adolfson and Peterson, Kraus-Anderson and Mortenson Construction a lot over the years,” he says. “You can always get a hold of us, we don’t ignore our phone and they know if there’s a problem, we’ll be there to take care of it.”

The problems aren’t common, though, and with between 300 and 500 jobs a year it’s quite a feat to mention the company’s reputation for success.

Most recently, the company has become known for its work in pervious concrete. This new technology is supportive of green and sustainable growth, utilizing storm water to recharge groundwater, reducing run off.

“The pervious is a big thing for us,” Virkus says. “It was a new product for Minnesota; the summer of 2009 was the first time they ever put a street in with it. We’ve been doing it for five years, so we’ve led the industry in this area.”

The first big project was in Shoreview, Minn., where NCCI repaved a neighborhood using the pervious concrete. NCCI was recognized by the MN Concrete Pavement Association and Mn/DOT for the project.

“A lot of attention was on that job since it was the first street, and it’s a green technology,” Virkus says.





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COMPANY AT A GLANCE

ESTABLISHED : 1996

PRESIDENT : KARL VIRKUS

ANNUAL REVENUE : \$10-\$12 MILLION

EMPLOYEES : 60

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While the pervious concrete has put NCCI on the map for its environmentally conscious business practices, the majority of the work is more traditional, and Virkus says the projects kept rolling in during the 2009 construction season, even with the national and local economies struggling.

"We did some work at the [University of Minnesota] Gopher Stadium and at the Twins Stadium," Virkus says. "We have done a lot of big, housing projects, commercial buildings that have won awards."

NCCI will continue to add to its resume this year, and Virkus hopes the company can add a few more tricks to its tool belt, including an emphasis on interior work. "We'd like to do a lot more interior work than what we do," Virkus says. "We're pretty much an exterior company right now."



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