

# Conservative blueprint gives Craft growth strategy

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Kathy Craft-Reich doesn't shy away from a "conservative" label.

"The company's recent growth was because I was conservative about how the company would progress," said Craft-Reich, president of Craft Architects PLLC, a Seattle firm specializing in industrial projects. "We didn't necessarily go along at the same rate as the economy."

In fact, the boom economy and the frenzied pace of the construction industry during the last several years made some things more difficult. Namely, hiring.

Craft Architects found itself competing for staff with larger and more high-profile architecture firms that had bigger budgets.

When architects could cherry-pick their positions with firms that were clamoring for workers, they tended to want to work on high-profile projects – the new condos, hotels and office buildings. Craft specializes in industrial properties.

Craft-Reich says that designing for industrial projects is rewarding and enjoyable.

"When you are working with industrial properties, you're not working with complicated parts," Craft-Reich said. "It's pretty much just steel and concrete



Kathy Craft-Reich is congratulated by Mr. Rodger Benson of M.A. Mortenson Company upon accepting her award at PSBJ's Fastest-Growing Private Companies celebration.

so it's our job to make it aesthetically interesting, unique, modern, and different."

Additionally, part of the challenge is being familiar with a particular industry, for example, knowing truck sizes and laws regulating the placement of trailer docks. Architects must also be knowledgeable about updates from the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) and be well-versed in the latest technological advances.

"We have to know how business is processed through a facility," Craft-Reich said, adding: "We do way more than 'pretty.'"

During the construction boom, Craft-Reich spent a few years adapting to the staffing dilemma. She managed by acting conservatively: hiring only when necessary and keeping a close-knit network of partners that would help when she needed project-based outsourcing for tasks such as high-end rendering and overflow drafting.

Because the firm has fewer than 10 full-time employees, Craft-Reich said, one of its assets is its ability to move quickly and be flexible with projects. This agility also enables designers to respond easily to clients, who are apt to return because of the good service they received.

With repeat business plus referrals from clients and general contractors,

Craft-Reich has had to do little to market the company.

Four design awards from the National Association of Industrial and Office Properties have given Craft Architects publicity and the widely recognized portfolio that will lead the company to branch out further into the marketplace. Specifically, the company is looking for more large corporate headquarters projects.

Still, Craft-Reich said she'll remain conservative in her approach and hope that the company continues to exceed her expectations.

At a company retreat early this year, company executives laid out goals to reach by the end of 2010. The team set out to hire a senior-level person, add a new client that has the potential for return business and attain a certain dollar amount worth of business. All of this was achieved by the fall of 2008. By year's end, she projects the company will pull in revenues of about \$1.8 million.

"Everyone told me that it was at about the five-year point of a business when you've networked and the layers of projects start coming back to you," Craft-Reich said. "And that's what has happened. We now have more referrals and we're just growing exponentially."

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CRAFT  
ARCHITECTS PLLC

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Seattle

Architectural design firm

Fiscal year	Total operating revenue	No. of employees
2005	\$0.78M	4
2006	\$0.95M	6
2007	\$1.83M	6