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Cannon said that building in and around hospitals has unique constraints. “It’s highly regulatory. It takes a lot of technical knowledge. You’re often working next to active units that are taking care of patients,” Cannon said.

“We are going to be working in close proximity to some of the sickest of sick cancer patients, and we’re going to have a longer time in this Capacity-Building Warehouse to get the competency of the firms up to a level that you can meaningfully deploy them on your projects,” Cannon said. BJC does not want the opportunity of a project of this scale to be wasted.

“We wanted the diverse firms in this town to emerge from this project stronger than when they went into it,” Cannon said, “so that we achieve real progress on the diversity front.”

Gaining experience

Fermin Glasper, president and CEO of Glasper Professional Services (GPS), is one of the MBEs working on the new project. GPS is a civil engineering and land surveying firm that was introduced to the project by Castle Contracting.

“Initially, we started by doing a subsurface utility mapping evolution for the main structure of the new renewal project,” Glasper said. “They wanted us to understand where the utilities lie on the entire 250-acre campus.”

Glasper said his company has increased its business, capacity and received additional work because of his relationship with BJC. GPS also has partnered with BJC on two other firms, to form civil engineering services for the ongoing design on the project. Now GPS is doing all the civil engineering for the renovation project, which includes gas, water, sewer; the location and re-routing of those utilities; changes to roadways; grading terrain; hydrology; and three-dimensional modeling.

Mohler said BJC is deliberately working with the local architect and engineering community.

“We said, ‘Let’s grow the architecture or engineers, either from a company standpoint or from within a company,’” Mohler said.

“Maybe it’s a majority company, and we look at how to grow the minority piece from within, that either through interns or their work for us. It is not easy, but we are doing it here. Mohler cited GPS and African-American architect Karl Grice as two firms discovered in the process.

Mark said BJC’s relationship with the National Association of Minority Architects is providing additional opportunities, along with internship programs.

“Through an apprenticeship program like this, your owner is expecting to see those apprentices and keep them here to learn enough so that, when they go on to another place, they have something on their resume,” Marks said.

“It’s one thing to count percentages, but it’s another thing to change people — and that’s what’s happening here.”

Karl Grice, principal of Grice Architects in St. Louis, said he has wanted to work in health care for years, but getting those projects proved difficult.

Most of the clients want firms that are experienced in health care, so for us it was always a Catch 22,” Grice said. “We couldn’t get on the project because of no experience, and we couldn’t gain experience without being on a project.

Grice has an architect and an architect intern embarked at the project management office who are responsible for BIM design modeling on the new tower.

“Grice architects can reveal potential problems in construction before they happen,” Grice said.

“If there’s a light that might be in the way to shut down an outlet that’s in the wrong place; or a door is swinging and hitting another door, those kinds of things are clearly identified in this computer model and solved before it gets into construction.” Grice said. “It reduces the amount of change orders and delays in the project.”

Firms in the Capacity-Building Warehouse also participate in the BJC 101 program to sharpen business skills and learn how they conduct business with BJC and how to transfer that knowledge. It is led by Marks and Associates in conjunction with BJC design or construction team members.

“BIC 101 is a five-year initiative rolled out on a quarterly basis that will allow businesses to grow in various ways, whether it’s an aspect of business, in actual contracting, in bonding, in how BJC does business,” Mohler said.

Growing the competition

Stretching the capacity of MBE/WBEs also means relying on businesses that currently work for BJC to help in the owner in grooming these minority businesses — which, is in some degree, asking them to help grow their future competition.

“You can imagine that’s not always an easy thing for people.” Cannon said. “This is a situation where we have come together as a community and say ‘This is very, very important.’

“This is really important to us, and we are putting resources behind it in a way that has not been done before,” Valerie Larkin, program manager, said a version of it before, on a smaller scale, by BJC.

“Two good examples of what we are trying to do here we did 10 years ago when we did the Center for Advanced Medicine,” Larkin said.

That included a small group of minority companies that we hired — the firms that did our work for BJC. One of them was a little cabinet and installation company called Interface Construction (a WBE), and you know where they go.” And the other one was Castle Construction, which was a building and two-dump trucks. Last year, they did $40 million worth of business.

St. Louis’ Interface Construction was founded in 1978 by CEO Sam Buchinsky, is an MBE construction management firm, that has worked on construction projects in health care, commercial/retail, educational, and industrial. And Interface Construction has worked on projects valued at over $300 million, according to its website.

“We got them on and helped them along, and they did good work. It was the same kind of thing, it will be a marvelous success.”

To watch a live webinar of development/construction, find more information and other information about the progress of their visit BJCconstruction.org.