

PROBLEM SOLVERS, GOAL SETTERS & LEADERS

**Elite Construction Rentals LLC
stands by its work and its word**

by **Tonie Auer**

When *Elite Construction Rentals LLC* (Elite) started in 2003, the company's concept was to compete with big construction equipment rental firms. It accomplished that goal largely because its team had expertise in the construction world and the ability to look at the big picture. That experienced team created a natural segue for the firm to offer construction services, too, starting in 2010. This service line is now leading the company's operations.

"The company started with a small fleet of about 50 rental pieces of used equipment," says Elite's Vice President Mark Kolakowski. "Our leadership realized the only way to

compete was to expand our offerings and develop direct relationships with manufacturers." So, Elite developed strategic partnerships with regional and national players in the construction industry and expanded its fleet size to more than 400 pieces of equipment. Based in Wallingford, Connecticut, the company now conducts business in 15 states.

"From 2003 to 2018, the firm's rental business increased 300 percent," Mark says.

"But where the real growth has been is in the general trades division where the firm has grown the business 700 percent since 2010," he adds.

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REVVING UP

In 2008, Elite developed a relationship with JLG Industries, Inc. and began purchasing equipment directly from the firm. "This was a significant step for the growth of the company," Mark says. "We've continued to develop our manufacturing relationships by also developing a servicing dealer relationship with Genie – a Terex brand," he says.

From there, it was natural for the company's ownership to capitalize

on its network to develop distributorships with several manufacturers of construction products, in addition to renting the equipment. Mark says establishing all these relationships led Elite to organize as a general trade company in 2010. It began supplying a variety of construction specialty products for Divisions 10, 11 and 12 in construction projects and started to provide framing and drywall services to general contractors, subcontractors and owners on smaller projects.

"This was a major accomplishment for the company to establish future growth potential," Mark says. "The company's rental growth has been wonderful. On an annual basis, the firm is generating approximately \$15 million in revenues, with general trades making up 60 percent of that business and equipment rental making up the remaining 40 percent."

BUILDING BLOCKS

Mark says the firm's staff of 45 ranges from employees with

Elite Construction Rentals LLC's 120-foot JLG Ultra Series Telescopic Boom Lift is outside the dining hall at The Hole in the Wall Gang Camp in Ashford, Connecticut. Elite secured a General Trades remodel for the facility.





Elite Construction Rentals LLC installs the cupola at Maplewood at Southport, a senior living community in Southport, Connecticut.

more than 30 years of experience working in the construction industry to those who are up-and-coming in the industry. Much of the team consists of carpenters, he says, which makes it natural for the company to not only provide building project materials—like toilet partitions, wire mesh cages, appliances, lockers and more—but also to install them.

Additional services the firm provides include general trades, interior and exterior framing, metal stud framing and drywalling, carpentry, wood framing, construction planning and project management, Mark says.

“We grew through some difficult times starting in 2008 when the market was really down,” he continues. “That is what made us

unique; we created a niche in the marketplace that met people’s needs and now we’ve made a name for ourselves.”

Mark says the firm works with many major general contractors, including Turner; Gilbane Building Company; Consigli; KBE Building Corporation; O&G Industries; CE Floyd Company, Inc.; EMJ Corporation; Nosal Builders, Inc.; A.P. Construction, Inc. and Banton Construction Company. He says Elite has many direct-owner relationships, as well.

The firm has partnered with these contractors on many projects, including elementary, middle and high schools throughout Connecticut, as well as on several higher education projects. For example, Elite partnered with Turner on the University of Connecticut’s (UConn) new three-story 191,000-square foot Student Recreation Center. Elite is supplying and installing all the lockers and gym equipment.

Elite has also worked on an unusual project for UConn Health in Farmington as part of a general trade package. The firm provided all the window treatments, visual display boards and other projection screens. Part of the project included three large curved projection screens that were installed in sections because each screen was 63 feet wide and 19 feet tall. Elite also installed the large curtains that cover the screens.

Another of Elite’s major projects was Seabury, an active life plan community in Bloomfield.

“This was a \$2 million project consisting of a general trades contract



The Elite Construction Rentals LLC management team near a line of aerial lifts ready to leave the home office. Pictured (from left to right) are Mark Kolakowski, Vice President; Bruce Theriault, lead estimator; Evan Polos, operations manager; Kirstin Grivalsky, human resources specialist; Kord Baker, director of construction; Susan Duva, controller; and Alan Roth, lead account executive.

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Mark Kolakowski, Vice President, Elite Construction Rentals LLC

to supply multiple Division 10, 11 and 12 product lines. We provided all the residential appliances, toilet accessories and window treatments in each apartment. There were multiple rooms in each facility and we also installed the motorized shades in the chapel. The chapel work also included the installation of the wood beam and decking roof; it was a start-to-finish project in the chapel,” Mark says.

Elite is also doing renovations for Microsoft Stores around the country. The firm is reinforcing the stores’ display walls. Mark says his team demolishes the existing wall, then reinforces it with structural steel and finishes it off. Each store is done in a week by a traveling crew that has spent the past 18 months flying around to different parts of the country to complete these installations. So far, the crew has traveled to New York, Florida, Texas, Indiana, Michigan and California, among other states.

Elite also has been successful in the senior living and multifamily markets. Mark says the company is currently working on more than 10 of these types of projects throughout multiple states.

GOAL-ORIENTED

Mark says the firm is in the midst of completing a three-year strategic plan.

“In the past, we were only thinking about the next year,” he says, “But we realized that if we continued to do that, we had the potential to fall behind the times. We needed to look ahead. So, we created five goals within our three-year plan.” The first goal is creating a company culture that reinforces the Elite vision, mission statement and values throughout all areas of the organization. Signs reinforcing those beliefs are displayed throughout the company’s facilities. Mark adds that other ways to develop this culture



Elite Construction Rentals LLC employees install the wood beam and decking roof at Seabury, an active life plan community in Bloomfield, Connecticut, utilizing JLG aerial lifts from the Elite Rental Division. Elite was awarded a general trade contract installing Divisions 10, 11, 12 products and worked with W.W. Timbers, Inc. installing the wood beam and decking roof on the chapel.

“We are problem solvers. When people have an issue, they call us and we get them out of a jam. That’s because of the relationships we’ve built with our clients. We want to make their lives a little easier, and the people in our organization are dedicated to filling our customers’ needs by overcoming challenges.”

Mark Kolakowski

are through discussions during quarterly reviews with employees and by hiring employees who have similar values to Elite’s core values.

Additionally, leadership will influence the team by supporting a variety of social and community events. Mark says one way he tries to do that is through the scholarship program that was established in his father’s name 28 years ago. The Henry S. Kolakowski Jr. Memorial Scholarship is awarded to high school seniors graduating from around the Wallingford and Meriden communities. Over the years, nearly \$250,000 in scholarship funds has been awarded.

“My father was an educator and a guidance counselor. He worked his way up to administration in both towns, but passed away at an early age,” Mark says. “He touched a lot of people and we hope this keeps his memory alive while helping individuals continue their education.”

SMART GROWTH

The second goal is what Mark calls smart growth; it’s focused on specific financial targets and particular markets that Elite’s leadership wants to pursue. “We are looking at the success stories we’ve had and trying to duplicate that by developing new relationships and expanding in different market sectors and product lines,”

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he says. We will continue to operate in our strong suits, but we want to look at retail, manufacturing and industrial markets as part of the process.”

“In our prior strategic plan, we wanted to get more active in social media so we developed our LinkedIn profile,” Mark says. “We encouraged all of our employees to utilize this site and we even hosted LinkedIn Fridays to promote employees networking on the system. We also developed a Facebook page and Twitter page. Our website was upgraded to show the work that we do; we need to continue to grow our brand awareness. One way to do that is by measuring the number of website hits and pages that people are visiting. We measure this monthly,” he says.

The third goal addresses the succession plans of the organization. The firm is working toward increasing and growing the skills of employees throughout the organization. This step is essential to prepare these individuals for their own advancement, Mark says.

Mark says the fourth goal is capitalizing on the most important component of the firm: its employees.

“They are the largest asset in our organization, and we couldn’t have gotten where we are without them. We are looking to improve our on-boarding process with new employees while continuing to provide feedback to our existing employees,” he says. “We want them to be aware of potential growth opportunities by providing consistent feedback, support and coaching; by doing this, we can ensure they are getting the required assistance they need. A lot of our employees are long-term, so we want to show new employees that they have the same potential growth opportunities and help



Elite Construction Rentals LLC team members install louvers at the State of Connecticut Department of Transportation building in Waterbury, Connecticut. The Elite team members are on an Elite JLG scissor lift from the firm’s rental division.



Elite Construction Rentals LLC installed wire mesh storage cages at the State of Connecticut Department of Transportation building.



Residential appliance and washroom accessories were installed in the kitchen of the State of Connecticut Department of Transportation building in Waterbury, Connecticut.

them build their goals to get there. Building a bench is essential to the success of our company and the next generation of employees.”

The firm’s fifth strategic goal is “operational excellence,” Mark says. The team is focused on a Six Sigma approach to operational excellence. Since Six Sigma means different things to different organizations, he explains that at Elite the idea is to improve customer services from the inside out.

“All of our employees will be involved in the redevelopment of their departments’ standard operating procedures and manuals for each individual role,” he says. “We plan to create ways to track our success, develop best practices and understand the areas where we have more to learn. We do this by identifying what occurred and why, and creating a feedback structure. This

collaborative effort will create understanding of every role and what is needed for the company success.”

The three-year plan starts in 2019 and will conclude in 2021. There are goals for each year. Mark says the management team will host a “Quarterly Deep Dive” process to track how the team is doing. “We are doing some unique things as a small company,” he adds.

“Everyone is excited about the process; we have to start thinking about long-term growth both as individuals and as an organization,” he says. “In 2014, our strategic planning team created a vision statement that details the heart of the organization: We challenge the mindset of the construction industry by persevering through challenges, leading with vision and creating solutions that make your construction experience easier.”

GOLDEN RULE

The vision statement outlines the way Elite operates on a daily basis, Mark says. “We are problem solvers. When people have an issue, they call us and we get them out of a jam.

That’s because of the relationships we’ve built with our clients. We want to make their lives a little easier, and the people in our organization are dedicated to filling our customers’ needs by overcoming challenges. There are a lot of those in the construction industry. We do this by standing by our work and our word.”

Tonie Auer is an award-winning reporter/writer/blogger and has written for many major AEC publications nationwide.

ELITE’S CORE VALUES - IN THEIR OWN WORDS:

Perseverance – Dedicated to fulfilling customer needs by overcoming any challenges.

Leadership – By setting examples for others to follow, we lead with vision, accountability, coaching and mentoring.

Integrity – We stand by our work and our word.