The Los Angeles Unified School District chose PCL Construction Services to build its Central Los Angeles High School No. 9, which, when complete, will feature seven buildings and cover 10 acres.

# Partnerships Make it Work

The new 'showpiece' of the Los Angeles school system is benefiting from PCL's dedication to partnership, employee ownership and ability to maintain a strict schedule.

By Staci Davidson

When the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) began preparing the construction of Central Los Angeles High School No. 9, which it said would be the "signature" school for the district, it knew it needed a contractor that could handle the job.

The new 10-acre campus will have seven buildings, including a 950-seat performing arts theater, parking garage/gymnasium, library, cafeteria and classroom buildings, totaling 238,000 square feet.

With its focus on performing and visual arts, the school is expected to have a huge impact on furthering performing and visual arts on a community scale in Los Angeles. LAUSD decided PCL Construction Services Inc. was the right contractor for the job.

"We are famous for driving the schedule home on our projects," says D.W. Watts, construction manager.

"LAUSD needed a contractor that was going to get the job done efficiently and with superior quality. We have a history of good partnerships. We stress frequent communication with subs and PCL is employee-owned, so our people take pride in their work. We were excited to partner with LAUSD and make this school available to the community."

**PCL Construction Services Inc. – LAUSD**
www.pcl.com
**PCL Construction Budget:** $171.9 million
**Location:** Los Angeles
**Employees onsite:** 20
**Services:** General contractor
**D.W. Watts, construction manager:** "Close partnering is the key to a smooth project."

### On-Time Expectations

PCL received the notice to proceed in March 2006 and is expected to finish the project in fall 2008 before school starts. So far, 55 percent of the work is complete, major structural work continues and interior utility systems are progressing. Additionally, the concrete structure for the parking garage is complete.

Recently, *Construction Today* spoke with Watts about the project's challenges and how PCL has structured the project to ensure quality and on-time completion.

***Construction Today:*** What has been your progress on the project so far?

***D.W. Watts:*** We are virtually working in every building – everything is being constructed at once.

What is great is that the arts and music buildings are

ahead of schedule; we believe they will be completed by the end of the year. This is due to the great subs and people that we have onsite.

**CT:** How do you keep the work going smoothly?

**DWW:** Our partnering sessions are very important. We developed the trailer complex, so the owner's rep, architect and general contractors are all very close. It is easy for all of us to talk to each other.

Close partnering is the key to a smooth project. We don't always agree, but we always come to a resolution.

It is important that everyone involved wants to be a partner. A project is very much like a marriage; you have to work at it for it to be successful.

**CT:** Other than being close in proximity on the job site, how do you ensure constant communication?

**DWW:** We conduct regular owner meetings and regular inspector reviews. We have weekly coordination meetings with major subs and have weekly meetings with just the mechanical, plumbing and electrical subs because of their specialized work.

Also, every Friday morning, we walk through the site with the owner and the inspector to monitor progress and address any issue we see.

To ensure everyone is on the same page, we spend a lot of time on the schedule. We do a three-week look-ahead schedule and review it weekly with the owner so that everyone knows their target and where they're going.

It is a lot of work to coordinate everyone on the site, but the schedule keeps things organized and ensures all the work is getting done.

**CT:** Why was PCL a good fit for this project?

**DWW:** Well, the amount of work PCL does – our volume – shows our extensive experience. Also, PCL is 100 percent employee-owned, which makes each project very personal.

Our employees are dedicated to doing the best so they can get the biggest return, and this is a big plus to owners because they know we will deliver a quality project.

In the past LAUSD has had a bad rap for how they've dealt with contractors, however, in recent years they have been

Los Angeles Unified School District's Central Los Angeles High School No. 9 will have seven buildings, with its focus on performing and visual arts.

**MAYA STEEL FABRICATIONS**

Maya Steel Fabrications has been in business for 27 years and has been involved in many challenging projects. As one of the recognized leaders of the Southland in both quality and performance in the steel industry, Maya Steel is dedicated to providing customer satisfaction by controlling costs, as well as maintaining project schedule.

Maya Steel received bid drawings for Central High School #9 in June of 2004 and was immediately captivated by the unique design and location of this project. The startling features of the library, tower, and helix captivated Maya Steel's founders, Yechiel Yogev and Meir Amsalam, General Manager Gerald Sanders, and Senior Project Manager Darren Madden, to be a part of this wonderful addition to the Los Angeles landscape. Maya Steel estimators sharpened their pencils and landed the job.

The first meeting that Maya Steel attended made it clear that everyone in attendance was positive and eager to make this project a success. LAUSD IOR Chris Lugo spoke at length regarding his personal commitment to resolving problems as quickly and painlessly as possible. Mr. Lugo has kept that commitment. With the help of Todd Whitehouse, Don Watts, and other personnel of PCL Construction, working together in partnership, many problems were solved and many challenges were faced head-on, both logistically and conceptually. The design team, HMC Architectural Group, headed by JR Richardson and Karoline Schmidbaur, has kept the model and timetable in step with the needs of the project. Maya Steel's detailing team, SNC Engineering, represented by Sang Chin and Brian Lee, has been instrumental in Maya Steel's ability to produce this extraordinary structure. Maya Steel would like to give special thanks to LAUSD's Moty Eisenberg for his fair dealings on the project. The inspection team led by LAUSD's Bruce Sorenson, and shop inspection by Dennis Frutos of Smith-Emery, has ensured a quality product for the kids of Los Angeles. Maya Steel is very happy to be a part in the creation of this Los Angeles landmark.

Maya Steel Fabrications, Inc. was founded in 1982 by Yechiel Yogev and Meir Amsalam in Los Angeles, California. The company specializes in low and medium rise structural steel buildings. It offers specialty fabrication from custom-built grand architectural stairs, metal fabrication for canopies, enclosures, special stands, stainless steel products, guardrails for covered arenas, prisons, hotels, universities, theaters, laboratories, air traffic tower controls, etc.

Maya Steel has successfully executed contracts with strict specifications for earthquake zones and newly implemented welding procedures for state-of-the-art ductile moment frames. Since 1982, the company has completed dozens of buildings and is currently involved with high profile jobs in California.

Currently holding a California Contractors State License as a structural steel fabricator and erector, Maya Steel is a woman-owned business enterprise established in 1982 and incorporated in 1986. Located in an industrial suburb of Los Angeles, Maya Steel has approximately 8,000 square feet of office space and about 100,000 square feet of warehouse. Its personnel consist of about 100 employees, from engineers to administrative clerks, from shop welders to field ironworkers.

*Throughout its 25-year history, Maya Steel has completed a variety of schools,hospitals, prisons, theaters, military installations, commercial and office buildings in southern and northern California, as well as in Las Vegas, Nevada*

**Maya Steel Fabrications, Inc.**

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working hard to show they can be the owner of choice.

It is all about partnership. I told them at the beginning that the project is going to be finished, but there is an easy way and hard way to finish it. You might as well do it the easy way because it results in a better overall project.

LAUSD wants to prove they can partner with contractors and we want to show that inspectors can work with us. At the end of the job, LAUSD and the inspectors hopefully will be big advocates of PCL.

**CT:** What types of challenges have you come across?

**DWW:** We are working on seven buildings at once, so that is a challenge in itself. It is a congested work site so we need a good workflow.

Being on schedule helps us overcome that because everyone is where they're supposed to be.

We also have to sequence the trades through the job to ensure everyone has enough manpower.

We need all of the subs to buy into the plan and finish their part so we stay on schedule and the project is completed efficiently. If you have enough manpower, have the proper sequence and remain coordinated, that is what you need to succeed.

Our very dry weather has helped us stay on schedule. We are pushing to pull ahead in case we encounter weather challenges. Also, there are many inspectors and approvals that are required, so that can be challenging.

The project is far from being finished, but we are already planning how to close out the buildings. This was something we learned on other projects – have the steps in place so everything can be done efficiently and we can address potential problems before they become big issues.

For example, the theater building has always been scheduled to complete behind the other buildings.

If we can't turn it over at the same time as the other buildings, we have to figure out how to keep that part of the site secure and isolated from the students when school starts.

We have already met with the fire marshal to start coordinating contingency plans if that building completes as per schedule.

**CT:** What have you learned on this project that you can carry forward?

**DWW:** This project reinforced what we already knew: Partnering sessions are very important. However, daily conversations and personal interactions are the keys to success.

It is critical that you build your reputation and trust fast with new people. You do that by doing what you say you will do. This is why we get so much repeat work – clients know we can be trusted. This project is exceptional because the team has meshed so well.

When we started this project, we had to hire a lot of new engineers. I told them at the beginning, this work can be stressful, but they need to have fun, too. It is important to understand that you will always get the work done.

At some point, all hell will break loose, but you work through it, and when you look back, you realize it wasn't all that bad. You will always get it done, you just have to work as a team to find the best resolution. ■

MARNE CONSTRUCTION
STATE CERTIFIED D.V.B.E.

Marne Construction is proud to work alongside PCL on High School #9 and California's top General Contractors on High School #11, East Valley H.S., Beverly Vista School.

Marne Construction is a bondable union site concrete contractor certified as a Disabled Veterans Business Enterprise (D.V.B.E.).

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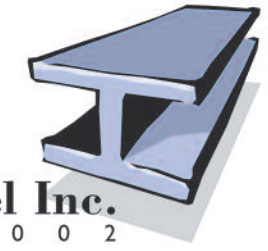

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