

Metal Architecture

March 2015

MTC

www.metalarchitecture.com

29th Annual Architect Survey

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Rising From the Ashes

Metalcrafter forges ahead with new construction honoring its rich history

By Marci Gass

Wendell August Forge is America's oldest and largest forge, producing hand-wrought ornamental metalware and elegant giftware in aluminum and other metals since 1923. In March 2010, days after celebrating the acquisition of two of the largest product orders in its 90-year history, the company was in mourning. Its Grove City, Pa., flagship location, which included manufacturing, corporate offices and retail was completely ravaged by fire.

Wanting to rise from the ashes as quickly as possible, Wendell August engaged Wesex Corp., West Middlesex, Pa., an Authorized Nucor Builder, as the design-build developer to construct a facility that employees, the community and visitors alike would once again embrace as a destination. The \$8 million project included \$5.75 million for the design and construction of a comprehensive 60,000-square-foot facility.

RISING TO THE CHALLENGE

Over the year following the fire, Wendell August made do in temporary space while receiving proposals from architects, general contractors and developers for a new facility. Due to a funding gap from the underinsured loss, Wesex stepped in to assist with the procurement of a \$4 million grant for the project. In December 2011, the Wendell August team focus was quickly directed from operations to the construction of a new facility due to insurance and potential tax consequences if the facility was not substantially complete by Dec. 31, 2013.

Wesex utilized an entirely integrated approach, challenging traditional delivery methods by accepting responsibility for every facet of the project, thereby ensuring its success. The scope of work consisted of the design and construction of a manufacturing, warehouse, flagship retail store and corporate office facility located on 12 acres in Springfield Township, Pa.

After selecting the site on farmland located within a mile of Interstate 79 in Grove City with no road access or utilities, Wesex navigated all land and real estate development requirements on behalf of Wendell August. The inherent challenges of developing an industrial park in three months were daunting coupled with the requirements for utility approval



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for off-site systems that were near capacity.

BIM KEEPS THE PROJECT ON TRACK

Building Information Modeling (BIM) was implemented into the project at the schematic design phase and the working model was utilized through construction drawings. The integration of BIM assisted in clash detection, budgeting, constructability and scheduling. BIM models were shared across the design and construction team from day one through the construction documents and final close-out phases. The BIM model was also utilized for foundation integration and excavation based on Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) requirements.

A DESIGN HONORING THE PAST


Honoring the rich history of Wendell August was a priority to the owner. The original facility lost in the fire had been on the National Register of Historic Places since 1996 and preserving the glory of the iconic company was essential. The design intent was to preserve the company's vintage look with a rural Americana flair that included attractive woodwork and natural, rustic materials throughout the new space.

A Waterloo, Ind.-based Nucor Buildings System's pre-engineered metal building was selected as a versatile and economical option. Coordination between Wesex, Nucor Building Systems and the architects using BIM was necessary to ensure every detail was accounted for. The result was a customized, contiguous pre-engineered facility featuring a 160-foot by 80-foot single-slope structure housing the retail space connected to a 180-foot by 226-foot structure with stone piers, white Nucor Classic Wall Panel, and a 226-foot architectural sign band on the

exterior of the manufacturing area. The exterior of the retail area features cement lap-siding and trim, three dormers to let in an abundance of natural light and a decorative metal sign tower. The facility also used Nucor ClearBay roof joist system and a Nucor composite CFR Standing Seam Roof System.

On the interior, the retail area introduces thin-brick and rough-cut lumber along the walls, exposed ductwork and features that remind the visitor of a rustic barn. The office space reflects a more modern atmosphere with stained concrete, exposed spiral ductwork, and large breakout areas for teamwork—all fostering a creative and collaborative environment. The use of alternate materials throughout the retail and office spaces saved roughly \$1 million.

After eight months of construction, Wendell August's new, modern facility was occupied in late October 2013, just in time for the holiday rush. The new structure houses every component of the business: corporate office headquarters, retail flagship store, manufacturing facility, as well as warehouse and distribution functions. The project was completed on time and on budget thanks to the utilization of BIM throughout the collaboration process.

In late-2014, Wesex Corp., along with project team members including Desmone Architects, Pittsburgh, Civil & Environmental Consultants Inc., Pittsburgh, and Nucor Building Systems, was presented with The National Award of Excellence for Commercial/Office Buildings from the Design-Build Institute of America for the Wendell August building. 

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