

The Construction Industry Faces COVID-19 Traci Miller's and Miller Construction's Perspective



As we miss the collegiality and information flow of daily life – and great events including CIASF's – we have launched question and answer sessions with key real estate executives and thought leaders. See below for insight on how Traci Miller - Senior VP at Miller Construction and proud CIASF Board Member - is handling the pandemic. We would also like to thank Traci for her great work as an integral member of the CIASF Board. We send these emails, most of all, with the hope that you and your family are safe, and your business resilient.

How has the COVID-19 crisis changed your day to day business, and what does your new normal look like?

Construction sites are still up and running, but we gave each of our team members the option to work from home if they needed to for family, health or other reasons. The work-at-home option doesn't apply, though, to job site responsibilities, so we have a couple of folks who have opted to take some time off. The unique thing is that we are also in the process of moving our headquarters after 42 years in the same location. In the office, we were purging and packing with all of this is going on. On the job sites, our new normal was to institute even stricter safety policies than recommended. We've rented hand-washing stations for every site and have posters with reminders and we're inspecting our job sites to make sure all are complying. We're not allowing food trucks on the sites. We have masks on our job sites anyway because of silica and dust, but we've also provided more comfortable buffs that are washable. Our priority is to keep our people safe.

How do you see the construction pipeline changing?

Most of our jobs that have broken ground continue to push forward, although a couple of clients halted construction temporarily. We had another project fall in our lap even in this very strange time. Other projects will have a delayed start so more will get pushed into next year. Jobs in the pre-construction phase are still moving, but the permitting process will definitely delay construction start dates. We have good relationships with private inspectors and a lot of municipalities are allowing the use of them while their departments are shut down. So, if you have a permitted job, that can remove a potential roadblock.

Do you see relationships changing in this environment?

When this first started, our President Brian Sudduth reached out to every owner to confirm that we would be there as long as legally and ethically possible. Relationships with ongoing clients and repeat subcontractors allow us to go through this crisis as a team and be on the same page. We have heard a lot of, "We're in this together." We are going strong now, but the next few months will be tougher as new projects may be delayed. Many cities are changing their minds after first shutting down. Fire inspections will still happen. One problem is that there are so many municipalities that issue permits and their responses to this crisis can vary. I feel like this will be a V-shaped curve – with a quick bounce back. People will be happy to get back to work.

Are you working from home? Any tips to adjust to working from home?

I'm mostly working from home because it's easy to log on to our network and a quiet place to make calls. The duration of sitting at a computer at home without talking to people is what I am noticing the most. At work, I would never sit in one place for 3 hours or go that long without seeing someone else! I can get a lot of work done at home without interruption, but I'm a very social person and it's how I make my living so I do feel a little isolated at times. I've basically switched to video calls just to have a little face time. My husband works in the supply chain and is essential, so he's out of the house, too. If he were at home, he could finally work on my honey-do list!

Any other thoughts on doing business in this new era of "social distancing"?

I just want everybody to not feel doomsday. We are blessed to be able to continue paying our people. I want people to hang on and I want us to help those we can. Keep your head up. Keep your faith up. Be prepared to take off when this is all over and we know what our "new normal" will look like.