

Roof business is looking up
Millbury company tackles the biggest jobs



David Klein, president of Greenwood Industries in Millbury, shown at the new Worcester State Hospital, where his company is the roofing contractor. (T&G Staff/RICK CINCLAIR)

By Amy Laskowski SPECIAL TO THE TELEGRAM & GAZETTE

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Greenwood Industries workers are shown installing roofing on the Massachusetts Statehouse. (PHOTO COURTESY GREENWOOD INDUSTRIES)

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-- Kevin Flanigan, DIVISION OF CAPITAL ASSET MANAGEMENT

MILLBURY — For years, water leaked through the roof of the Massachusetts Statehouse, collecting in buckets. Now the roof is watertight, the Statehouse is dry, and the buckets have been put away.

The roof was fixed by Greenwood Industries Inc., which, among other tasks, replaced the copper panels on the state's most important government building — under budget and sooner than expected.

“Getting on a job of this size is a dream for a lot of our guys. It's like a mason being able to work with marble. You might never see a job of this magnitude again,” said Bob S. Sparks, a company foreman who worked on the statehouse job.

Founded in 1992 and headed by David S. Klein, Greenwood is in the roofing and sheet metal business. The company was started by Mr. Klein's sister; in early 1994, he became president. Greenwood reported \$500,000 in sales in the mid-1990s, and closed out 2010 with almost \$40 million in sales.

The Statehouse project topped off a successful year that earned the company its fourth appearance on Inc. magazine's list of 5,000 fastest growing private companies. In 2010, the company ranked 3,856th, up from 3,905th in 2007.

Employing 250 at peak in the summer and fall from offices in Millbury and North Haven, Conn., Greenwood serves industrial and commercial clients. Greenwood pays its roofers about \$35 an hour (not including benefits), which is collectively bargained. Employees receive a full benefits package, said Mr. Klein. The state average for this type of work is \$23.26 per hour, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Greenwood has worked on roofs all over New England, including at Whittier Regional Vocational Technical High School in Haverhill; the first phase of TD Bank Garden in Boston and on Boston Scientific's 11-acre distribution center in Quincy. In Worcester, Greenwood built East Hall's green roof at Worcester Polytechnic Institute; the roof at Walmart off Route 146, and is working on two projects under construction: the University of Massachusetts Medical School's cogeneration plant and the roof of the \$302 million psychiatric hospital on the grounds of the old Worcester State Hospital.

“A good roof starts with a good design, good product and good installation,” said Mr. Klein. “If you have one bad in there, it could be a problem.”

Mr. Klein, 40, of Southboro, and his father and uncle were roofers in the Worcester area. A Syracuse University graduate in information systems, Mr. Klein went to work at the office products retailer Staples after college, but soon learned that the corporate world wasn't his cup of tea. He knows how to lay a roof — having done so in his teens and 20s — but today runs the office, goes out to see jobs in progress and helps foremen plan out projects.

The roofing business is at times tough, partly because it is so dependent on weather.

“If it rains for three days straight, no one gets that time back,” said Mr. Klein. “We can't really work during the winter, but bad winters create work going forward, so it's a mixed blessing.” Another challenge has been the recession and its impact on construction, which drives part of the roofing business. Bill Good, executive vice president of the 4,000-member National Roofing Contractors Association, said industry revenues fell 30 percent in 2009, a “pretty bad year,” and bounced back a bit last year.

“Roofing tends to outperform other construction industries,” said Mr. Good. “If a roof is leaking, you can't put it off for a long time, and there is a big inventory of roofs that wear out every 20 years or so. And we are weather-dependent. If you get rain and heavy snow, those create work.”

The value of U.S. construction fell 10.3 percent to \$814.2 billion in 2010 from \$907.8 billion in 2009, according to the U.S. Department of Commerce. About half those Massachusetts contractors reporting to the trade group Associated General Contractors of America said they didn't expect the market to grow until 2012.

“We do not see a robust construction recovery because of lack of capital and building owners still reluctant to invest in capital expenditures, but we are also seeing some pent-up demand for our services, so we think 2011 will be better than 2010,” said Mr. Good.

Relationships Greenwood fostered prior to the recession have made all the difference, said Mr. Klein. “We were in a lot of markets where some companies like to do only private work or renovation, they limit themselves,” he said. “We play a lot of different fields — schools, businesses — and not everyone does that.”

Federal stimulus spending has also helped through a difficult economy. Greenwood won the bid to fix the roof on the U.S. Courthouse in Providence, and received close to \$2.1 million in stimulus money for the work, which included reroofing and masonry.

“A lot of the stimulus money helped companies like ours,” said Mr. Klein. “We knew the market, and we had a good balance between public and private work.”

The Massachusetts Statehouse was another public-sector job. The 278-year-old statehouse has had construction challenges over the years, including repairs to the foundation and brickwork. J.K. Scanlan Co. Inc. of East Falmouth, construction manager of the roof project, subcontracted certain aspects of the work, and in addition to the new roof, managed repair of the roof drainage system and repair and placement of skylights, some with integrated solar panels.

Greenwood was one of four companies that applied to repair the roof, and won the contract. The project began in spring 2009. Greenwood removed and replaced the existing copper roofing on the Brigham Annex and House Chamber. Almost everything needed fixing, with the exception of the iconic golden dome.

Mr. Sparks, the Greenwood foreman, said most of the work was replacing the copper panels on the roof. Each panel could be as long as 38 feet. Many were fabricated at Greenwood's shop in Millbury, and then hoisted by crane at the site.

Greenwood also replaced the cooling tower roof and waterproofed the porticos.

“The project posed a number of challenges, including the logistics of working on a large, occupied building within a congested urban area,” said Kevin Flanigan, spokesman for the state's Division of Capital Asset Management, in an e-mail. Materials for the project had to be lifted on

and off the roof by crane and stored primarily on the roof, he said. “This, along with the careful sequencing of Greenwood's work, which involved installation of waterproof membranes below the new copper, among other things, all required careful coordination with the entire project team.

“Finally, the historic nature and degree of architectural details on the roof, complete with a number of challenging building angles, skylights, corners, etc., all required a high degree of craftsmanship, coordination and quality control on the part of Greenwood and J.K. Scanlan,” said Mr. Flanigan.

Most of the roof work has been completed and the project is several months ahead of schedule, with final closeout projected in the spring or summer, he said. The project was originally slated for completion in fall 2011. Though a calculation isn't final yet, the state expects the project will come in at least 10 percent below the \$20.5 million estimated total budget, said Mr. Flanigan.

Another important trend for Greenwood and the roofing industry is the surge in desire for roofs to be more energy efficient. Roofs, if installed correctly, can insulate a house well enough to keep it cool in the summer and warm in the winter.

Massachusetts has been ahead of the curve in terms of green buildings. “This state requires more vapor barriers and more installation,” Mr. Klein said.

Greenwood has installed white roofing, a new popular system that repels the sun, and vegetated roofs, which is essentially a garden that grows on top of a roof.

“It helps with the storm runoff,” Mr. Klein said.

“Companies are realizing they have a huge asset in their roofs,” he said, not only for the management of storm runoff but also as a place to put solar panels to generate power for use or sale back into the grid. Greenwood also installs solar panels and skylights.

It has installed green roofs at Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Rhode Island's Providence campus; Stonehill College in Easton; and East Hall at WPI.

In managing a company that is expanding rapidly, the main thing, said Mr. Klein, is letting go of authority.

“The more I let other people do, the more the company grows. In the beginning, I did everything. But as I let go of certain jobs, the company has been able to grow. When you start your own business, it's hard to let other people do things,” he said.