

TOP 6 COMPANIES

1. Englewood Construction
2. Alpar Products
3. Faith Technologies
4. Clayco
5. BKL Architects
6. Build Safe Chicago



BKL ARCHITECTS Chicago

Leadership: David Brininstool, Thomas Kerwin, Brad Lynch

Founded: February 2010

Among other projects, BKL has entered a design competition for Aviation Industry Corp. of China's headquarters in Beijing.

Six Companies To Watch

There's no easy way to say it: The recession has been tough on construction companies. Work has dried up, people are out of work and offices have closed their doors. But new life is sprouting in the Midwest. **BY PAMELA DITTMER MCKUEN**

Although the past few years have been crushing for many enterprises working in and around the construction industry, some firms have managed to stand tall by reinventing and reinvigorating themselves, even as recession continued to bear down on sector after sector. Now that the bad economic times are lifting, the following firms are poised for even greater growth and recognition in 2011. Here are six firms in the Midwest region worth watching this year.

Englewood Construction

Dressed for success

While many industry players simply hunkered down to wait out the Great Recession, Lemont, Ill.-based

Englewood took a bold step: building a new corporate headquarters. The mid-size general contractor, which specializes in retail, restaurant, and shopping center work nationwide, overhauled a 14,000-sq-ft grocery that increased company space by 5,500 sq ft and presented Englewood with a gleaming new image. "I had a lot of sleepless nights thinking about whether to do this, but it kept our guys busy, and we got a great deal," says Englewood President Bill Di Santo.

To further enhance its prospects, Englewood expanded into new business sectors, including hotels and educational facilities, and wooed foreign retailers while U.S. clients took a pause. The contractor also embraced social media with the launch of industry blog Hard-HatChat.com, a forum that gained Englewood greater exposure and, more importantly, work.

Its efforts have paid off. Based on work in the pipeline, including a new American Girl store near Washington, D.C., Di Santo predicts 2011 revenues will sur-



pass the firm's record of \$38 million.

"We did what we had to do to get through the recession, and positioned ourselves to take off when the market got better," says Di Santo. "I really think 2011 is going to be a great year."

Alpar Architectural Products *Reinventing plastics*

Lisa Britton was working for a company that made wall-protection products with polyvinyl chloride (PVC) when she learned about the hazards it posed to human health and the environment. She also had a child with serious endocrine problems related to plasticizers.

Minneapolis-based Britton urged her superiors to make a safer product, but they weren't interested. So she did it herself. She hired a chemist who not only developed a bio-based polymer—essentially a plant-based plastic—but a material that met Class 1 requirements

for flame-spread and smoke density. Her company employs the polymer to manufacture crash rails, corner guards, hand rails and sheet wall protection. Britton may not be the first to go PVC-free, but she's the first to receive a fire rating for an alternative material.

It took Britton two years to get up and running. This year will mark her first full year in business, and she is targeting \$1 million in sales. "It was hard to convince people to invest in a new building product in the middle of a recession, but I was passionate," she says.

Faith Technologies *Keeping it lean*

An electrical, specialty, and technology systems contractor in Menasha, Wis., Faith responded to the recession with a lean construction program. It also hired a productivity director and formed a building information modeling (BIM) pre-construction team to expand

CLAYCO St. Louis
Employees: 1,500
Revenue: \$755M
Part of Clayco's clean-tech portfolio is this battery plant under construction in Midland, Mich., for electric and hybrid cars. Dow Kokam, which is spending up to \$322 million on the plant so far, hired Clayco last year as design-build contractor.

CHILD'S PLAY

Englewood builds the popular American Girl stores, like this one on Chicago's Magnificent Mile.



It also invested heavily in technology by hiring a chief information officer and beefing up BIM capability.

Business has been shifting from industrial and office to institutional and government, says Senior Vice President Lance Cage. Major projects for 2011 are a \$150 million electric-car battery plant for Dow Kokam in Midland, Mich., and a \$150 million tower for Missouri Baptist Medical Center in St. Louis.

Brininstool, Kerwin and Lynch Architects
Forging new partnerships

Chicago didn't win the 2016 Olympics, but a divergent group of architects who collaborated on housing designs for throngs of visitors found each other and founded a new firm. Thomas Kerwin left his position as managing partner at Skidmore, Owings & Merrill to join then-partners David Brininstool and Brad Lynch. Magellan Development Group, developer of Chicago's 28-acre Lakeshore East complex, is an investor.

Their talents are varied. Kerwin brings vast international experience, while Brininstool and Lynch's specialize in Chicago-style architecture. Magellan contributes expertise in finance and construction. Together, they are pursuing luxury mixed-use projects in the U.S. and abroad. They've all ready scored a Chicago housing project with Dutch developer INNO PLAN BV, and Kerwin is traveling throughout Southeast Asia to establish strategic local alliances.

Build Safe Chicago
Creating a better workplace

Build Safe Chicago isn't just a single company—it's a coalition of construction giants who are committed to sending all workers home injury-free each day.

"We all believe the construction industry is too hazardous," says the group's spokesman, Jeff Reimer, principal-in-charge at Bovis Lend Lease in Chicago. "These leading builders have agreed to put competition aside to work on a common set of safety initiatives."

Member firms will integrate their own best practices to compile the Build Safe Chicago Safety and Health Standards, some of which are sure to be more stringent than federal safety standards.

The initiative follows other Build Safe programs that have launched in New York, Washington, D.C., New England and New Jersey. The six founding members, in addition to Bovis, are Power Construction Co., Gilbane Building Co., Turner Construction Co., Kenny Construction Co. and Mortenson Construction. Interested in joining them? Contact Reimer at jeff.reimer@bovislendlease.com.

its integrated design. The internal retooling helped Faith bid more aggressively, says Chief Revenue Officer Tom Clark. The company found new business in military bases and food-processing markets—sectors that gained growth as the federal government sought to improve facilities for returning veterans, and financially strapped consumers traded nights out for nights in.

Although volume and employee count remain flat, Faith's backlog is 13% greater than a year ago. Clark projects revenues of \$240 million to \$250 million. "Even in a down economy, some people are spending," he says. "You have to adjust to find that type of work."

Clayco
Finding gold in green

Even before the recession kicked in, Clayco was developing a specialty in sustainability. The design-builder built one of the first green roofs in St. Louis and one of the two LEED Platinum commercial buildings in Missouri. That resume is a definite draw: About 70% of clients go for some level of certification.

But that's not the only reason the company kept revenues at about \$700 million during these lean years.

ON THE WEB

Construction Resources

For more info, visit the following sites:

Englewood's Blog:

HardHatChat.com

Alpar Products:

www.alpararch.com

BKL Architects:

www.bklarch.com

ENR Midwest:

enr.com/midwest