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Collaborative ACCESS

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ACCESSING MISSISSIPPI
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RENOVATION TASKS REQUIRE UNUSUAL CREATIVITY IN ACCESSING MISSISSIPPI FEDERAL BUILDING'S DEEP-SET WINDOWS

BY TOM DEJONG

The Dr. A.H. McCoy Federal Building in Jackson, Miss., is not only a landmark but a highly symbolic feature within the community. Constructed in 1979, the McCoy building is a 15-story precast-concrete professional office building typical of the period. It also is the first federal building in the United States to be named after an African-American. Currently, the structure is undergoing modernization by the U.S. General Service Administration (GSA) with stimulus funding from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). The project is one of 120 buildings throughout the country receiving funds from the act.

The \$87 million renovation will replace the building systems, improve energy performance and update the

WHO WAS A.H. MCCOY?

Dr. A. H. McCoy was a prominent dentist, entrepreneur and civil rights activist in Jackson, Miss. Born in 1903 to a wealthy African-American family, McCoy attended Tougaloo College (Jackson) and Meharry Medical College (Nashville, Tenn.) before returning to his hometown to open a dental practice. A successful businessman, McCoy built and operated two African-American theatres in Jackson and founded Security Life Insurance Co. of the South (Jackson) in 1938. In addition to his numerous business ventures, McCoy worked tirelessly to promote equal rights for local African-Americans and served as both a board member and president of the Mississippi chapter of the NAACP during the 1950s. McCoy died in 1970 and was honored 15 years later when the A. H. McCoy Federal Building became the first federal building in the United States to bear the name of an African-American.





tenant and public spaces. Alpha Installation and Waterproofing (Marietta, Ga.) is the firm in charge of the exterior work, which consists of two primary steps:

- Perform a chemical wash of the building’s facade
- Remove and replace the caulk on all windows.

Achieving Step 2 turned out to be a daunting task. Travis Morgan, superintendent for Alpha, anticipated complications early on.

“When starting the McCoy Federal Building project,” he said, “we knew it was going to be a challenge. The main concern was the recessed windows and how we were going to access them using a swing stage.

The windows recessed back about 4 feet from the face, and they were difficult to reach.”

Morgan explained that the project involved grinding out the existing caulk around each window to give the substrate a clean profile on which to receive a new application of caulk. “We approached the task with the conventional flip-out basket attached to the swing stage, but access was still difficult, and only one man could use the basket at a time, which slowed production down tremendously,” he said.

Conventional methods, obviously, weren’t going to be efficient.

To solve the Alpha team’s dilemma, a group of forward thinkers collaborated to develop a platform design that would provide the access needed but not require any type of anchors in the building’s facade, which could have jeopardized the integrity of the building.

THE COLLABORATORS GET TO WORK

Morgan’s firm reached out to James Sanford of Sunbelt Rentals (Birmingham, Ala.) to find an access solution. Sunbelt Rentals’ motto is, “Making it happen for our customers.” Morgan said that was exactly what the company did. As part of Sunbelt’s action plan, it appointed Bee Access Products (West Palm Beach, Fla.), a manufacturer of suspended scaffolding equipment, to create the platform design.

The challenge for Bee Access was to create a modular platform that provided full access to the building with 6-foot-deep by 20-foot-wide recessed areas at every floor level. As mentioned, adding to the concerns was the building owner’s prohibition against anchors. Author Tom DeJong and Brian Andrews of Bee Access quickly realized that standard products and previous designs that used single-width platform “porches” would not work due to the project’s extreme recess of 6 feet. A double-wide fixed porch was also out of the question as it

PROJECT LEADERS

GENERAL CONTRACTOR: Skanska USA Building Inc. (Queens, N.Y.)

EXTERIOR MAINTENANCE: Alpha Installation and Waterproofing (Marietta, Ga.)

ACCESS SOLUTIONS: Sunbelt Rentals (Birmingham, Ala.)

PLATFORM DESIGN: Bee Access Products (West Palm Beach, Fla.)

PLATFORM-MECHANISM COMPONENTS: Bee Access Products (West Palm Beach, Fla.) and Altrex (Zwolle, the Netherlands)



would be impractical and unsafe to push out and travel to the next level.

The goal, then, was to design a system that would ensure both productivity and safety. The concept DeJong and Andrews developed was a double-wide “sliding” porch kit comprised from standard Altrex (Zwolle, the Netherlands) modular-platform components integrated with Bee Access-designed accessories. The kit provided a maximum platform extension of 54 inches with a width of 20 feet. Counterweights slid back and forth automatically to provide a level, stable work platform at full extension.

To operate the assembly during suspension, two workers used a pulley system to extend the sliding porch into each recessed area. When ascending and descending, they could fully retract the porch, at which point it only extended 4 inches from the base platform for easy movement from recess to recess.

Chains on the ends of the porch provided guardrail protection and automatically became taut when fully extended. Crews also were able to adjust the chains as needed. The front guardrail moved in and out with the sliding porch to protect workers at all times.

Using the sliding porch system, Alpha’s crews were able to easily reach the windows while maintaining a proper

balance when retracting the porch. Alpha’s Morgan said, “The engineered sliding porch kit system got us right where we needed to be. This sped up our production and made it a safer project. Overall, this system exceeded my expectations and made Alpha Installation and Waterproofing look like the true professionals that we really are.”

Despite the complexity of the project, the collaboration among the visionaries at Alpha Installation and Waterproofing, Sunbelt Rentals and Bee Access Products produced a new design for the industry. This new option provides the momentum needed to complete this restoration project while providing new options for access on similar future projects.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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For more photos of the sliding porch, scan these QR codes with your smart phone.

