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BELFOR USA Transforms a Dated Corporate Headquarters Following Fire

By Patricia L. Harman



Photo courtesy of BELFOR

RESTORATION CONTRACTORS are used to putting structures and their contents back together following a fire, flood or other peril, but sometimes projects require more than the average restoration and rebuild. Such was the case with the UGI Corporation and AmeriGas Partners LP headquarters in King of Prussia, Pa., following an electrical fire.

The 38-year-old building spans five stories and covers 100,000 square feet. The fire began in an overhang outside of the first

floor, but under the second floor of the building. Initial reports indicated that the fire had only impacted the exterior of the building. A thorough walk-through revealed that the damage was far more extensive, filling the entire building with soot. In addition, the structural damage would require selective destruction and an extensive rebuild. The company used the opportunity to expand the building's first floor, update the exterior façade, and renovate the interior to reflect some of their corporate initiatives.

(Top) The entire façade was damaged by the fire and needed to be replaced. This led to the decision to update the look of the building.

(Center) Placing and replacing scrim was a regular activity throughout the project. Maintaining this critical water barrier was essential to preserving the interior surfaces.

(Bottom) Forest Stewardship Council certification ensured that the lumber used in the job came from sustainable sources.

“The fire turned out to be a blessing in disguise; the building was quite dated,” says Marcia Vogt, UGI’s facilities manager.

The Exton, Pa., office of BELFOR USA met the challenge by using its experts in the Philadelphia area and bringing in more technicians from its National Service Team. Over the next year or so, approximately 100 tradespeople would be involved. Guy Buttaro, a senior project manager for BELFOR, supervised the entire project.

“Timing was a huge issue for us,” explains Vogt. “The on-site project manager played a key role in making it all come together to meet our goal.”

The first step was to clean up the exterior perimeter of the building and secure the area identified as the origin of the fire. BELFOR carpenters built an enclosure around this area to protect it for fire investigators.

Next they set up air scrubbers inside the building to remove as much airborne particulate as possible so employees could enter the premises to sift through the contents. They were allowed in half a floor at a time to pack and mark what would be saved. Computers and their accessories were staged on the first floor for pick-up by the manufacturer for further evaluation and data recovery.

BELFOR set up an on-site ozone area, which saved substantial time and money since important documents and other materials did not have to be packed and moved off site for cleaning. Two rooms were converted into ozone chambers, and the documents were cleaned and restored there before being moved to the temporary headquarters housing the 350 employees.

After the documents were cleaned and removed, the cubicles were sent as scrap metal and recycled. Special Dumpsters™ were designated for fire-damaged mangled steel, furniture and other materials, as well as cracked concrete. These items were also recycled, and the scrap value was credited back to the company to help defray the cost of the project.

RECONSTRUCTION TEAM FACED OBSTACLES

Since the entire façade required replacement, UGI chose to update the exterior with granite panels and aluminum cladding. The existing window systems and overhangs were replaced, and 2,400 lineal feet of 8"x8" steel tubing was attached to the



Photo courtesy of BELFOR



Photo courtesy of BELFOR



Photo courtesy of BELFOR

modified steel structure to support the new granite panels. The granite was quarried in Norway and the panels were constructed in a shop in Lancaster, Pa. The use of the pre-fabricated panels enabled BELFOR to maintain the quality of the panels and save valuable time.

One of the challenges involved replacing two structural steel beams; special shoring had to be engineered to enable their replacement. A section of the second-floor steel joist, steel deck and concrete also had to be removed.

As part of the reconstruction, the first floor was extended to match the dimensions of the upper floors. BELFOR increased the first-floor footprint from 80'x180' to 100'x200', providing UGI with an additional 5,600 square feet. This required excavating the entire perimeter and removal of the existing foundation. An additional challenge involved protecting the fiber-optic line that fed the data center. BELFOR ran a redundant fiber-optic line to replace the original one, allowing the team to excavate and pour the new footers and perimeter foundation wall without impacting the functionality of the data center. The expanded first floor provided new meeting and conference rooms; the lobby was expanded and renovated as well.

During construction, BELFOR carefully orchestrated the preservation of the interior finishes on the remaining floors after the demolition and cleaning. This was an important aspect of the restoration process. All four upper floors received new doors, hardware and ceilings, and the walls were repainted or redecorated. New floor coverings, wiring and energy-efficient lighting were installed throughout the building. A new integrated heating and cooling system with energy-efficient boilers replaced the outdated systems.

"The biggest challenge by far was getting the work done by our drop-dead date," adds Vogt. "The project manager had superior skills in this area and had multiple contractors working around each other to get the job done."

PROJECT MET GREEN STANDARDS

As an energy company, UGI is extremely focused on energy-efficient and "green"

systems. In 2008, UGI created a team to develop a sustainability strategy for the company's domestic operations. They wanted green energy concepts to be an integral part of their company culture. The rebuild ensured that the building would meet many of these goals.

Working with BELFOR LEED-certified professionals and a UGI LEED architect, they were able to certify that the building was green-compliant. Careful records were kept throughout the reconstruction for the LEED process. Over 50 percent of the wood used in the project was certified by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), meaning that the wood came from forests specifically grown and maintained for harvest. Each piece of wood is stamped and requires a chain of custody. Wood that is not FSC-certified also had to be noted and logged. In addition, BELFOR used recycled steel, concrete and aluminum as part of the project.

Buttaro says the most challenging part of the project was protecting the remaining interior finishes from the weather while sequencing and replacing the exterior façade of the building. He also says that the various aspects of the building turned out as anticipated, particularly the new façade. "This project confirmed that anything is possible when everyone works together and keeps their commitments," he adds.

The \$8 million project used the most efficient practices available to create an environmentally sound future for UGI. Employees moved into their updated and vastly improved headquarters in early 2011.

"It is good to be on good terms with contractors in a situation like this," says Vogt. "We had many that we used prior to our renovation, and the long-term relationships played a key role in our ability to accomplish the renovation in a timely manner. UGI is extremely grateful to all of those who assisted in making our renovation a huge success."

Patricia L. Harman is the editor-in-chief of Cleaning & Restoration.

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