

CONSTRUCTION TODAY

MBI Group is a top New York City interiors firm known for its high-end projects.



A Focus on Complex Work

MBI Group has developed a niche in its New York market by completing unique, high-end projects. It competes with national firms but earns many jobs based on its track record of success.

As MBI Group's fifth employee hired shortly after the company's inception, Vice President of Special Projects Jean Greenlaw has seen the company grow from a small interiors firm to one of New York City's top-ranked construction organizations known for its high end-projects. Today, with a roster of more than 75 employees, the company completes projects in a variety of segments, including core and shell construction, retail and corporate interiors. "We're best known for constructing projects, both new buildings and fit-outs, that focus on using unique, high-end finishes," Greenlaw says.

With more than \$90 million in sales, the company works with many repeat customers and invests very little in advertising. "Clients find out about us mainly through word-of-mouth," she says. We compete with many larger national construction companies but, fortunately, we don't necessarily need to chase work"

MBI Group operates with a strong group of core employees, many of whom have been with the firm for more than a decade. "There is a strong bond between the employees, which helps create a tight-knit, highly efficient, working relationship," Greenlaw says. "We maintain a lean

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work force with each person having a defined and important role within the company. In addition, our management team is very involved in all aspects of our projects.

"[Our owner, Edward Campanella], believes service excellence is a habit and always makes himself available to the client or architect. He has a very visible presence from attending job meetings impromptu to visiting the job sites on a regular basis."

In addition, Marc Lovero, vice president operations, is highly involved in troubleshooting construction issues and maintains quality control and safety concerns on projects. "As a team, we work closely with our clients and architects," Greenlaw says. "As a result, we're known for completing some very beautiful projects often within very tight construction schedules. Marc maintains very tight control over all of the company's operations and really safeguards the interests of our clients – it is all about providing the best-quality project."

For example, the company is constructing a six-story, 60,000-square-foot, \$26 million building for Yeshiva University in New York City. The project is based on an 80 week schedule from erection of the steel, and poses a number of unique challenges. The structure itself is being built between two existing Yeshiva buildings, and will be tied into the adjoining library.

"From a safety stand point, this was a challenge," Greenlaw says. "There were thousands of students in the vicinity on a daily basis, so we focused on directing students through the area safely." The project, which broke ground in late 2007, will be completed in 2009.

In addition, MBI Group was enlisted to build the publishing offices for *Every Day with Rachel Ray*. This project not only included 20,000 square feet of office space including conference rooms, but it also required the firm to construct a 2,000 square-foot test kitchen facility.

"The office space was built and occupied first while the custom-made items for the kitchens were finalized," Greenlaw explains. "This was three test kitchens and one executive test kitchen with an attached conference room that is utilized for demonstrations and public relations events.

"The kitchens were state-of-the-art and included an extensive array of specialty, made-to-order features," she continues. "There were very strict regulations for the exhaust and fire-protection systems. It was much different than building a restaurant on the ground level of a building as we had to work within the building's existing infrastructure for this project on the 14th floor of a commercial office building."

The company is able to complete these complex projects by hiring talented, experienced construction professionals with strong attention to detail. MBI Group strives to find workers with extensive backgrounds in construction, and prefers to hire through referrals from existing employees. "We also do a lot of recruiting, because finding the appropriate man power has been a challenge, especially in this tight market place," Greenlaw explains. "It's especially important to make a correct fit with new employees so that they understand MBI's methodology, because if you get the wrong person on a project, it can affect the client's view of the project and our entire company."

Employees must be self-motivated, as well, to fit in with MBI Group's fast-paced culture. "This is a hard-working office," she says. "It's a great group, though; we like working together and view each other as extended family members. This is always important when you spend 10-plus hours a day working together."

Greenlaw anticipates this fast-paced environment will help add larger, more complex projects to the company's portfolio. "We're always trying to build larger, better caliber projects as opposed to just more jobs," she says.

The company plans to expand its new construction portfolio and set up a green building division. "We are constantly evolving the company to meet our growing clients' needs while also staying current with market trends," she says. "In addition, we are expanding our academic client base to include more school and private college projects."