

Smooth Operation

U.S. GENERAL CONSTRUCTION HAS BECOME A TRUSTED GENERAL CONTRACTOR. BY JANICE HOPPE-SPIERS



U.S. General has built a number of Olive Garden locations for Darden Restaurants.

When restaurant franchises and hospitality brands build in the Southeast, they look to U.S. General Construction's five decades of experience to deliver the highest-quality results. "Over the years we have completed a lot of buildings for the same franchises and customers because they trust us and know how we build," says Christopher Peden, payroll and marketing. "We are one of the top general contractors in the Southeast and have built a reputation for great prices and the best building quality out there."

Celebrating its 52nd anniversary in 2020, U.S. General has completed 3,000 restaurants, more than 300 banks and nearly 300 gas stations to date in 12 states throughout the Southeast. About 75 percent of its business is restaurant construction while the remaining 25 percent

includes shopping centers, banks, retail and gas stations.

Peden's grandfather, Richard Peden Sr., founded U.S. General in 1968 to specialize in overseeing the construction of restaurant franchises, mostly Wendy's Taco Bell and Pizza Hut. Peden Sr.'s son, Richie Peden, started working for the company 28 years ago and is now the president and owner. The father-and-son team began expanding the family business to include shopping centers, banks and gas stations.

Christopher Peden became the fourth-generation Peden to join the company in August 2019, focusing on marketing and payroll today. As part of his marketing responsibilities, Peden is working on new business development, reaching out to new franchises and clients to bid on new brands. "In terms of expansion, we are looking to

U.S. General Construction

www.usgeneral.org

- Revenue: \$45 million
 - Headquarters: Alpharetta, Ga.
 - Specialty: General contractor specializing in restaurants and hospitality
- "We are one of the top general contractors in the Southeast and have built a reputation for great prices and the best building quality out there."*
- Christopher Peden, payroll and marketing

get bigger and build bigger projects," Peden notes. "Myself and Richie have talked about looking at building smaller hotels and grocery stores, to name a few focus areas."

U.S. General added Planet Fitness, Popeyes, Dunkin', Culver's Restaurant and Guthrie's to its list of franchise clients this year. "We secured new clients this year and are very excited about it because each build has gone smoothly," Christopher Peden says.

Long-Term Clients

Tacala is the country's largest Taco Bell franchise and a long-term client of U.S. General's. Out of the 170 Taco Bell restaurants U.S. General has built, 52 of them have been for Tacala. "We have a really good relationship with Tacala and they are opening 35 Taco Bell restaurants in the next year, which we plan to be responsible for about 75 percent of those," Peden says. "That is really exciting for us and building for a franchise we know and who knows us makes the building process go that much smoother."

U.S. General completes a Taco Bell restaurant in 70 days because of its long-term relationship with the franchise and its knowledgeable superintendents. "When working with a new owner, you have to learn their preferences before you begin building," Peden explains. "We have built a good relationship with Tacala that we know what they want and expect, and we can always give them that in each Taco Bell we build for them."

'U.S. General is known for our quality of work and we will continue to deliver on that.'

U.S. General also works closely with Darden Restaurants, having built a number of Olive Garden, Longhorn and Bahama Breeze restaurants for the company. The company recently completed a 7,500-square-foot Olive Garden in 140 days. "Every Olive Garden is unique in that the building is wrapped in stone," Peden explains. "This was our 25th Olive Garden we have built for Darden, and it went very smooth with no hiccups along the way."

Because of its successful track record, Darden invited U.S. General to bid on another Olive Garden build.

Loyal Workforce

U.S. General has 18 projects on average going on at one time because of the strong economy. Because of that and its desire to expand further into the hospitality sector, the company is looking to recruit new superintendents. "Right now, we have about 16 superintendents and would like to get up to around 20," Peden says. "The average age of our superintendents is around 45 and as people look to retire, we need to fill those spots."

The average tenure of a U.S. General employee is 15 years, which Peden attributes to the company's loyalty and appreciation of its staff. "My grandfather and my dad both passed on to me that if you treat employees like family, they will stay true and dedicated to you, and that's rang true," Peden says. "In my three months as an employee, and even before when I would intern, I hear all the time about how loyal the company is, which is why we have no turnover. People want to work for us and we hope U.S. General feels like a second home to all our employees."

U.S. General's loyalty extends into its subcontractors as it keeps a

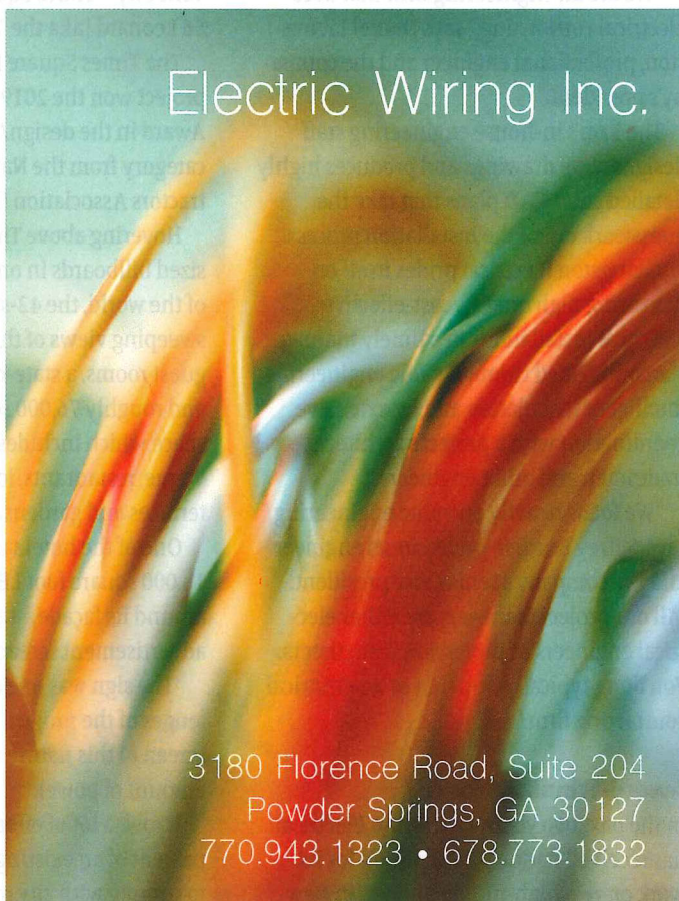
core group that performs 90 percent of the trade work on its projects. "Some of our subs only work for us, and we give them so much work so they can only work for us," Peden explains. "We have really great subs that we rely on and some we have been using for 30 years now."

U.S. General makes safety its No. 1 priority on every job site, which also shows its employees and subs how much it cares for their well-being. "In our nearly 52 years of business, there have been very few accidents on job sites because of how well our superintendents are trained," Peden notes. "They know the safety rules and regulations that must be followed. Safety is of the utmost importance."

A New Decade

As U.S. General embarks on its 52nd year in business, the company is looking to expand further into the hospitality sector. The company has bid on a three-story, mixed-use building that will include 50,000 square feet of retail on the bottom floor and two floors of condominiums. "We have never done condos before, so this would be a huge step into the condo and hotel aspect of construction," Peden says. "We hope this project will help us get our foot in the door and another example of how we are moving into bigger projects."

In 2020, U.S. General also plans to continue focusing on Taco Bell restaurants as well as its new franchise clients' restaurant builds. "We hope the economy continues to do well in 2020 so we can keep bidding and building," Peden notes. "U.S. General is known for our quality of work and we will continue to deliver on that reputation." ♦



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