

## Charter Builders-

### Delivering Performance and Accountability

By Ron Taylor

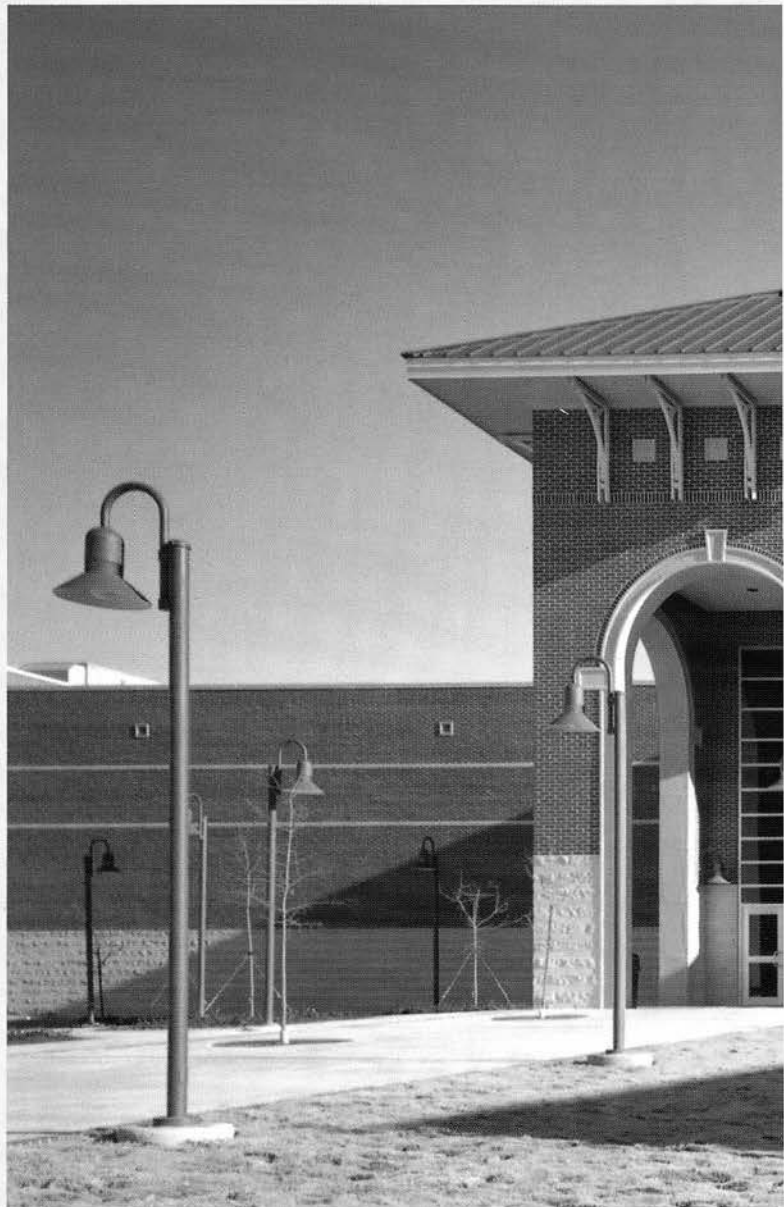
**I**t appears suddenly and dramatically to motorists driving East on Interstate 30 as they approach the western boundary of Weatherford, Texas. However, the new 350,000 square foot Weatherford High School does not loom or impose itself on the eye of the beholder. Rather, the structure seems to “nestle” comfortably in the northwest slope of one of the area’s gently rolling hills. It is a tribute to the work of VLK Architects of Arlington, Texas, that a structure of this size seems to evolve so organically out of its environment.

Construction Manager, Charter Builders Ltd. of Dallas, has partnered with VLK on numerous projects in the educational field that has been Charters’ focus for several years. Charter President, Colin Graidage counts them as a great team player because of their shared focus on “the customer”.

These two companies also work together so well because of their shared emphasis on careful planning. Observed Joe Schultz, Assistant Superintendent for Business and Operations for the Weatherford ISD, “We really got tired of meeting with the architect. Because of the scope of the project, we met almost daily for nearly a year. In retrospect, the design phase eliminated many problems that could have arisen during construction. We’re very thankful that VLK Architects, Richard Jaynes in particular, paid so much attention to detail in the design phase. The building and completion have gone smoothly because of that time spent”.

Charter Builders’ performance for a number of North Texas school districts has earned them a reputation for delivering major construction projects on schedule and on budget. “Public entities don’t need fishing expeditions, they need performance and accountability” is the way Charter Builders’ Graidage sums up the relationship.

In addition to their successful work for many school districts, Charter Builders is active in the construction



of churches, high profile retail such as Willow Bend, commercial developments that include Addison Circle and The Pyramids at Park Lane, and sports facilities that include Dragon Stadium in Southlake.

**O**ne unique and challenging project was the Fire Department Training Facility located on the Northwest campus of Tarrant County College. Charter Builders’ performance on this unique facility prompted these letters from developer Symtron Systems, Inc. of Fair Lawn, New Jersey and from the faculty of Tarrant County College:

*“Symtron Systems has been involved in the development of over one hundred and fifty fire training facilities around the world. This is one of the few times that I can say that the project went by*



*the plan. We have been working with construction firms for over twenty years in the delivery of these fire training facilities. During that time few projects have been completed on time and within budget. My compliments to you and your staff on a job well done."*

James W. Hanson  
Chief Operating Officer  
Symtron Systems

*"Each time I walk into the Fire Service Training Center, I am still overcome with amazement at the finished product. This project involved many unusual requirements and building challenges. Most of the credit for the exceptional outcome of this project goes to the team from Charter Builders. Thank You, does not begin to express our appreciation for the unequalled performance of Charter Builders and the role played by your company in the completion of this*

*state-of-the-art facility that is reputed to be the only one of its kind."*

Dr. Lois E. Wells  
Dean of Instruction  
Tarrant County College, Northwest Campus

**W**hatever the type of construction, one constant seems to remain. That is the respect and confidence that Charter Builders garners from their customers and from other members of the building team.

For Charter Builders, delivering performance and accountability means that you must have the right people in place from the top down. Bruce Helm, Vice President of Estimating and Purchasing, is the management member who must set the pace in this initial task. Bruce is described by management as



"a great early coordinator, he keeps everyone on schedule including our customers." One way that Helm accomplishes this task is by giving the customer a clear understanding of the scheduling demands of every aspect of a job. This gives the customer ample time to make decisions that are well thought out and not made in haste.

Charles E. DeVoe III, Vice President of Construction Operations assumes the critical responsibility for relationships with subcontractors. In his view, "We work for our subcontractors in a sense. Our ability to keep subcontractors sequenced properly optimizes their time and efficiency and impacts their bottom line. If we perform well for them, they, in turn, can perform well for us." The result - in ten years Charter Builders has finished every project it has undertaken on time!

**C**harter always seeks proposals from many subcontractors on new construction management contracts, and proposals are opened in the presence of the customer. "In that way, everyone knows that a truly free market exists," commented Graidage. To ensure an open proposal process and exceptional response, Charter devotes considerable time to soliciting proposals from potential subcontractors.

Once subcontractors are determined, Charter's management insists on meeting with the supervisor who will be on the job for that subcontractor. This is another example of the emphasis on personal relationships that Charter finds critical to a well-managed project. "For instance," added Graidage, "We will work with one area mechanical contractor if, and only if, we can have one particular supervisor on the job."

For Charter, another paramount consideration in working with subcontractors is safety. "We run a clean job site and are very sequence and schedule driven," said John Lunardon, Vice President in charge of Safety and Quality Management. Lunardon's team watches the work carefully for safety procedures. Before their proposal is accepted, each subcontractor must explain their procedure for risk management. On-going safety awareness is maintained with weekly meetings to discuss safety issues and procedures.

**S**afety was a special concern at Weatherford High School because of its many high spaces and many large, open areas. The building is constructed with a central, high volume lobby. A central circulation spine also runs the length of the complex with many areas of high ceilings. The school also contains a state-of-the-art 2,000 seat auditorium with balcony seating, and



Photos by: Nathan Shands, Shands Photographics

full motorized fly loft. There are three gymnasiums (two practice and one competition gym) with many specialized mechanical components such as telescoping bleachers. These spaces all required great care and planning to avoid serious accidents.

Charter Builder's point man on the construction site is Monty Welborn, Site Superintendent. Working with Monty is William Goade and, for both of them, Weatherford High School has been a labor of love, albeit a day and night one. It is a labor that will continue for some time to come. "We stay engaged for the long term," said Welborn. "These are complicated structures. We don't walk away. They are always our structures."

In the case of this structure, it seems that few would want to walk away from such a beautiful facility. The school's soaring open spaces, filled with abundant natural light from clerestory windows and glass walls, impart a feeling of warmth and freedom. The abundant use of brick from Acme Brick's Perla, Arkansas Plant, cream colored block from Featherlite Building Materials, and cast stone, add to the warmth of both the interior and exterior environment.

**V**LK Architects chose to use masonry extensively for the Weatherford High School project because of its aesthetic appeal, value and durability. The permanence of these masonry surfaces ensures that the beauty of Weatherford High will last with little or no maintenance. High traffic areas of the school's interior also feature brick or block to minimize maintenance and add to the visual appeal of this environment. The architect used brick detailing and cast stone on the school's exterior to articulate the building envelop and create an aesthetically pleasing scale for this large facility.

For Weatherford High School, VLK Architects created separate zones for academics, athletics and fine arts joined by a sun-filled central circulation corridor. An "Academic House Concept" concentrates classrooms in distinct "houses" in three, two story wings. This



allows students to interface with a much smaller group of people during their tenure, providing for closer relationships between students and teachers.

Thoughtful design, planning and execution have created an inspiring facility that will provide many decades of functional service to the citizens of Weatherford and beauty to the eyes of the beholders.

**I**t is not unusual for companies to receive letters of commendation containing phrases such as "Your help was instrumental in the success of our project." or, "we were very pleased with your professionalism." However, typical phrases in letters of appreciation to Charter Builders are: "Your company's dedication is responsible for the success of this project" or "Charter Builder's commitment to service and quality is unprecedented."

Here are some other comments excerpted from letters sent from Charters Builder's customers:

*"On behalf of SHW Group, Inc., I would like to thank you and express my strongest appreciation for the quality of work that Charter Builders provided in constructing Ranchview High School. The success of this project typifies the teamwork that should exist between client, architect and construction manager. Charlie DeVoe's group did an excellent job at managing the entire construction process. A 250,00 square foot facility in just over fourteen months is incredible."*

Terry Hoyle  
Senior Vice President SHW Group, Inc.  
Architects+Engineers





Photos by: Nathan Shands, Shands Photographics

*"The commitment and performance made by Charter Builders and staff, your resources and subcontractors during our programming and construction phase, in my view, is unprecedented...As a result we have completed over \$29,000,000. worth of construction on schedule and in budget."*

John Hryorchuk  
Program Director  
Midlothian ISD 1999 Bond Program

*"I wanted to take a minute to express my appreciation to your company for the job you have done for R.L. Turner High School. I cannot imagine going through the last two years without Charter Builders as a part of my team."*

Kim Holland  
Principal  
Turner High School

*"As the Aledo High School project comes to a close, I wanted to say THANKS to the entire Charter Team for a job well done. This project had every obstacle possible, including the lack of a developed road, limited water, no sewer or electricity. Your team worked tirelessly to orchestrate a perfect project, delivered on the bid price and under the bid time. It was nothing short of a "textbook" delivery in all respects. I have one complaint and that's the fact that you're not building more facilities for our firm."*

Christopher M. Huckabee  
AIA President  
Huckabee & Associates, Inc.

*"As I sign the final payment application on the Texas State Capitol Extension Project, I want to thank you for your continued commitment to this project."*

*"The building is beautiful and has now functioned well during two legislative sessions. On a daily basis, the public expresses their pride in this remarkable public building."*

Dealey Herndon  
Executive Director  
State Preservation Board

*"In my thirty-eight years in this profession, I state without reservation that your firm is by far the best I have ever had the privilege of working with. If I could have my way, Charter Builders would do every project for our district."*

Joe M. Tison  
Superintendent  
Weatherford ISD

Industry recognition includes selection as the 2000 Contractor of the Year from the American Institute of Architects, the 2000 and 2001 Safety Excellence Award from the AGC, Dallas and a National Safety Excellence Award from National AGC in 2001. Also in 2001, Quoin recognized Colin Graidage, Charter's President for his services to industry and education by presenting him with the association's highest honor, the SIR Award. 🏠

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