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Bird earns Builder Award with \$200-million OPP modernization

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Building an Ontario Provincial Police detachment is one thing, constructing 18 of them across Ontario concurrently is another matter altogether.

The latter was the agenda for Bird Design Build Limited, the design-build contractor for the new cop shops, regional command centres, detachments and forensic identification units in 16 communities across Ontario.

Completed last November, the big job comprised a \$200 million modernization program, which included 27,000 square metres of new space. It garnered Bird an Ontario General Contractors Association Ontario Builder Award, judged on criteria such as on-site safety, environmental design and owner satisfaction.

“We weren’t expecting the award at all. There are a lot of good builders in the province that did a lot of good projects,” explains Clinton Carr, construction manager on the project for Bird.

Bird faced a hectic schedule to meet the OPP’s modernization program. The legwork prior to construction was considerable — coordinated with the OPP, Infrastructure Ontario, the prime consultants and Honeywell, facilities manager for the next 30 years.

A top priority was overlapping projects to ensure each one had ample materials and labour supply throughout construction. By mid-spring last year every project was up and running, with

construction peaked at 500 to 700 workers, says Carr.

“We were turning over two buildings a month from last spring through to November,” he adds. The smallest detachments took about nine months to complete; the larger centres up to 15 months.

The biggest projects were the command centres, with the largest being the Orillia Regional Command Centre at about 54,000 square feet.

Carr says each site came with its own challenges. At Orillia, for example, concerns that the site was a nesting ground for a rare bird called the Bobolink set the project back six weeks for an environmental review.

While none of the buildings were completed behind schedule, some were ready for occupancy one to two months ahead of deadline, he says.

In order to achieve LEED Silver certification, extensive energy modeling was required for all the buildings. The Orillia command centre incorporated a geothermal system, he adds.

To keep costs down and speed construction timelines, the detachments and forensic units were based on one design model, although each comes with its own design permutations. The buildings are structural steel, steel stud frame and brick masonry, says Carr.

The project was done by union trades. Carr says part of the modernization’s success was the availability of skilled labour to draw from the various union locals in each region.

“If you were a non-union contractor trying to do this project across the province, you might have had some problems securing enough skilled workers,” he says.

Three sites in northern Ontario (Armstrong, Nipogon, and Dryden) were contracted out to general contractor Tom Jones Corporation of Thunder Bay. Cy Rheault Construction Ltd. was retained as the GC for Kapuskasing, South Porcupine and Iroquois Falls. Frecon Construction Ltd. and Collaborative Structures Limited did site supervision at other sites.

“As you can imagine with work on 16 different sites, to have 16 superintendents of your own available at the same time was the reason we turned to our connections in the industry to sub out some of the work.”

It is not the first time that Bird has done concurrent projects for one owner, says Carr. Twice in Alberta, Bird was the contractor for a spate of new schools, and the contractor also constructed several schools at one time for an owner in Atlantic Canada.

The modernization’s prime consultant was NORR architects and associate Shore Tilbe Perkins + Will.
