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Local contractor embraces the city's construction jungle

San Antonio Business Journal - by [Tricia Lynn Silva](#)

The construction industry can be a real survival adventure.

Just ask David Baer.

"You have to like to work outdoors -- in the heat, the cold and the rain," says Baer, who is the vice president of the San Antonio office of general contracting firm **CF Jordan LP**.

And sometimes your clients can be real animals.

Just ask Baer.

Earlier this week, Baer's firm saw one of its latest projects make its debut: The Africa Live! exhibit at the San Antonio Zoo.

The project required that CF Jordan not only take into account the viewing public that will enjoy this exhibit, but the animals in the zoo as well.

"There was nothing typical about (the project)," says Baer, who adds that the project was as much artwork as it was construction work.

"It takes a special group of people to do (this kind of project)," says Steve McCusker, director of the San Antonio Zoo. "In this case, the people at CF Jordan got it."

At present, Africa Live! spans about an acre and a half of space. The focus of this first phase of the exhibit is the value of water and the intricacy of the way water, man, wildlife and food production interrelate, McCusker explains.

The exhibit includes an underwater exhibit of hippos and crocodiles. A couple of full-water tanks feature fish from two important lakes in Kenya -- Lake Turkana and Lake Magadi.

The challenges for such a project were many. Finding ways to keep it as cost-efficient as possible, for example, was a very lengthy process -- filled with some immovable factors.



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Brady Hester (L) and David Baer are leading the San Antonio office of CF Jordan LP through the wild world of the construction market.

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"The hippos aren't going to shrink," Baer says. "This has been our most unique project -- much more complex than people would ever imagine.

"You don't just put the halter on the hippo and walk him down the path," he adds.

Welcome to the jungle

Working with creatures day and night, however, wasn't as bad as having to work through the wet summer San Antonio endured this past year.

"We worked through some really lousy weather. It was miserable," says Baer, who is also pragmatic about the experience: "You work through it. We chose this business."

"But once it became operational to the public, it was worth the trip," he adds.

But with plenty of work on the books, Baer and his co-workers have little time to enjoy the fruits of their labor on Africa Live!

A couple of luxury developments are, for example, keeping CF Jordan busy these days.

In late 2006, CF Jordan began construction on Vidorra -- a 154-unit, high-rise condominium project located just east of downtown. It is a joint development by San Antonio firms **DTMLS LLC** and **Presidian Development**, Management and Consulting.

The company has also begun work on The Vistana -- a 14-story high rise that is slated to bring 247 market-rate rental residential units to downtown San Antonio. The developer is Edward A. Cross II.

For Baer, CF Jordan's participation in such visible projects speaks to his belief that a construction firm is only as good as its most recent project.

"Your next job is based on your last job," he says. "We've enjoyed great success, because we have a good track record."

That includes a record of persistence to bring a project to fruition.

"They didn't get it at first," says McCusker of CF Jordan's work on the Africa Live! project. "But they kept working at it until they got it right."

"I don't like surprises, not even good surprises," says Terry Parks, treasurer and chief financial officer for the Community Bible Church. CF Jordan has done several developments for the far North Side church -- including building a new sanctuary and a new administration/child-education facility.

"You want someone who can visualize your vision and capture what is the function (of your project)," Parks continues. "(CF Jordan) caught that concept at the front end."

For 2006, CF Jordan's track record translated to \$64.9 million in commercial billings for the local office -- making it the eighth largest commercial contractor in San Antonio, according to Business

Journal research.

Baer expects that the numbers for 2007 will exceed the 2006 mark. The trend, he adds, should continue for 2008 and 2009 as well.

New frontier

Headquartered in El Paso, CF Jordan was established in 1969. The local office opened in 1978.

In the beginning, much of CF Jordan's work came via bid projects in the public and private sector.

In 2001, CF Jordan hired Brady Hester to change the focus of the firm -- from bidding projects to negotiating with private developers for work.

"(The bid process) is a way to scratch your way into the market, but the economic environment is much tougher," says Hester, who serves as the director of business development for CF Jordan in San Antonio. "You're bidding at pretty skinny profits."

Two years later, Baer joined the firm to continue CF Jordan's transition toward negotiated projects. Today, the construction company deals almost exclusively in negotiated contracts.

With the firm in good shape for 2008, Baer and Hester have begun looking for opportunities that will keep CF Jordan busy in the coming years.

"It's time to start thinking about 2009 and 2010," Baer says.

But all the pre-planning may not protect construction firms like CF Jordan -- should the real estate market take a dive. It's that prospect that can make negotiated work with private developers more risky -- as potential clients start to put the brakes on future projects.

"The market could turn upside down, but we don't want to operate by fear," Baer says.

Besides, Baer and others in the construction business have a more pressing issue to contend with.

"We are in a workforce crisis -- really, it is a crisis," he says. "We need to keep new blood coming in to our workforce. Someone still has to build (these projects)."

Baer and Hester, however, remain confident about the future of their firm -- especially given its place in a booming city like San Antonio.

"I believe this town is one of the sweetest spots in an otherwise soft economy," Baer says. "It's one of the last, best-kept secrets."

CF Jordan at a glance

- Firm was founded in El Paso in 1969 by Paco Jordan
- The local office opened for business in the 1980s
- Past projects include: Community Bible Church, new sanctuary, three-story education and

administration building; SeaWorld San Antonio; Holiday Inn Riverwalk; Sterling Bank building; Cornerstone I and II Business Park

• Current projects include: Vidorra Townhomes, The Vistana, Lack's Distribution Center in Schertz, Laredo Distribution Center business park

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