

ISFA FABRICATOR PROFILE: Plastic Specialties

Plastic Specialties, based in Salt Lake City, Utah, has been serving the countertop industries for 50 years this year, and can trace its history back even farther.

As the first company in the state to work with Corian Solid Surface, it has gone through a lot of changes over the years and developed an amazing skill set that has earned it plenty of high-profile work. This has led to a diverse client base and a sterling reputation.

One of its more recent high-profile projects was taking part in the recent renovation of the Vivint Center, the home to NBA's Utah Jazz basketball team.

However, before getting into the details of that significant and challenging project, to get a real feel for the company, one must understand its roots.

History

That part of the story begins in 1968 when the original founder, Albert Cecil Pehrson Jr., was working for his father. The company's name at that point was Cove Tops and had a home in downtown Salt Lake City. The focus of the original company was countertops for modular/mobile homes.

After a stint in the army, Albert returned to run the day-to-day operations of the business with a friend, and the two eventually took over the company and changed the name to Plastic Specialties. Growth, followed by a change of address, was on the menu in the late '70s, where the business relocated to a larger facility in Murray, Utah, and then later to its current and much larger location in Salt Lake City, Utah.

Kelly Pehrson Passey, who now owns the business, was only 13 at the time, and remembers vividly taking the bus with her sister (three transfers to get to her dad's location) to sweep floors and help where needed. At the end of very long days, Albert would load up the two girls and take them home. But the business grew on Kelly. She began working full-time for her dad at age 18, assisting with office-type duties, and when another female employee left, Kelly took over operations in the office. She really fell in love with all aspects of the business, so when Albert decided to retire in 2000, it was a natural move for him to offer to sell the company to his partner and Kelly. She was all in.

A bit nervous to take over the company and associated financial obligations required to pay it off, she persisted and by the end of 2018, she will have not only paid off her initial obligation, but will have successfully bought out her original partner. Plastic Specialties gained a sole owner in Kelly Passey, who was now the third generation of her family to work there as an owner.

Moving Forward

Plastic Specialties has always been a solid surface fabrication company, and as the first in the state to offer Corian, it remains a mainstay for it today. The company also does a lot of business with both Formica and Wilsonart laminate. Quartz and granite have also become mainstays in offerings both on the commercial and residential sides of the business. The future promises to bring additional focus to both quartz and granite. The company is also an expert in cabinetry.

Passey has grown the company to 28 full-time employees, and to her that means "my family is growing." She is absolutely committed to the well-being of every single employee and treats them just like she

does each client! Her long-standing philosophy is straightforward and simply put, to “build and maintain relationships.” Kelly challenges her employees to really get to know each client and their wants and needs, and then through follow-up, creates a very comfortable long-term relationship with each. The market for Plastic Specialties is diverse and expansive. On the commercial side with general contractors and millworkers (many of which Passey has maintained relationships since the mid '70s) and also through new homes, remodels, box stores, designers and architects. Consistently working in all surrounding states, Plastic Specialties has the people, technology and equipment to complete any job, and they have proven that over and over again now into the company's fifth decade of doing business in Utah.

Plastic Specialties is more than accustomed to performing at high levels and completing impeccable quality jobs. The company has NEVER turned down a job because they couldn't provide the anticipated finished product. And the jobs list is an impressive one: Goldman Sachs, Nike, Hill Air Force Base, the Huntsman Cancer Hospital, I H C Hospital, McKay Dee Hospital, Boeing, Adobe, Swire Coca Cola and 200 public and private schools. The company has completed jobs throughout Utah, Wyoming, Idaho, South Dakota and Nevada, and Passey said, “We are willing and able to take on any job at any time in any location. This is our passion and we will always stand behind our initial bids, promises, quality and overall commitment to our clients.”

All That Jazz

So, with the responsibility that the company has tackled and the success and dedication it has had, it's easy to understand how Plastic Specialties became a major player in the \$125 million renovation to Vivint Smart Home Arena, the basketball home of the Utah Jazz located in downtown Salt Lake City. “We had done work on the prior arena, The Delta Center,” said Passey, “and we knew the high expectations of the Miller family, the team owners, and our mind-set was simply, whatever they need in the time frame they need it, we'll get it done.” And Plastic Specialties delivered — again.

Plastic Specialties was contacted for immediate help on the arena by contractor Boswell Wasatch. They reached out as deadlines loomed Sept. 5, 2017, with the “finish” completion timeline strict and looming. The entire renovation project had to be completed by Sept. 27! This major, multipart project had been dropped in Passey's lap with only three weeks to complete some of the most important areas inside of the arena. While not optimal, the company accepted the challenge.

Plastic Specialties had worked on the previous team home, The Delta Center. It was the largest project the company had tackled to that point and included all of the countertops in every concession area of the building.

Passey leaned on longtime General Manager Ben Robinson to get the project done. Robinson has been with the company since 1989 and has overseen dozens of large projects. “By the time the cabinets went in, we had approximately two weeks to put all the solid surface countertops in,” he said. “We worked in the media area, the coaches' locker room and meeting area, private restrooms, what would be called a light training area with medical facilities, and the family waiting and relaxation area.”

The surface products of choice for this particular job: Corian and Formica. “Those were the specs for the arena,” said Robinson. “We understand the quality of both products and we've worked with both for decades now, so meeting their specifications was absolutely no problem at all. The products look great and perform exactly how we would expect. It is an easy thing to have confidence in each project when you have superior products with which to work.”

Robinson said with this, just like so many other projects, it is an “I want it tomorrow but need it today”-type world, and that was especially true with the deadlines associated with the Vivint Smart Home Arena project.

And the work of Plastic Specialties was a slam dunk! “We did not bring in any additional employees,” said Passey. “We just worked overtime — a lot of overtime, and everyone on the team pulled together. We completed every single job given to us in a professional manner, with high quality, both on time and on budget.

We are absolutely proud in every aspect of the work we provided on the remodeled arena, and it provides a sense of pride and ownership to all of Plastic Specialties employees when they realize the large role we played in this important downtown Salt Lake City project.”

Work on the Vivint Smart Home Arena is simply a recent accomplishment for Plastic Specialties. However, the industry and regional business community certainly have taken notice of the company and Passey’s role there. With the success of the company and commitment to it, it is perhaps easy to understand why in March 2018, she was named one of “30 Women to Watch” by Utah Business Magazine, the state’s foremost business publication.

There’s little doubt with the history, dedication, skills and knowledge accumulated there, along with a focus to please the client, even in the trickiest of situations, that the business will continue to thrive for years, perhaps even generations, to come.

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