

# GAITHERSBURG COMMERCIAL PAINT CONTRACTOR SPECIALIZES IN TOUGH JOBS



WILLIAM MURRAY - The Washington Construction News Special Feature



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## Cochran & Mann Inc.

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Cultivating and maintaining good relationships with a few dozen general contractors and property developers has enabled a Gaithersburg-based paint company to maintain consistent growth.

"I like to know the owner," said Michael S. Cochran, the president of Cochran & Mann Inc. "I have to know who I'm doing business with." If a company has trouble paying its bills or it's difficult to deal with from the outset, it may not be a relationship worth continuing, he said. Cochran hopes that these relationships will help his company survive what could be a tough year in the commercial contracting business.

He started the business in 1990 after leaving a paint company that ended during the recession. "There was no work anywhere," he recalled. Things



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could only get better.

Cochran grew up in a family where his entire family worked as painters and paperhangers, and he cobbled together a few dozen jobs during the first year and painted with his cousin and co-founder Will Cochran and a few employees while handing paperwork in the evenings. Mike Cochran's uncle and co-founder Bill Cochran, who pitched in, gave the company even more credibility among general contractors and property developers because of his 40 years of

paint business experience.

"Many paint companies grow too big too fast," Cochran observed. If a company is handling too many large jobs at one time, it can easily end up consuming all of its resources before realizing its in financial doom. "We don't have to get every job, just the better ones," he said. His \$6 million company employs about 90 people.

Meeting deadlines is a crucial aspect to commercial paint business success, Cochran said. "We're the

painter. We're the last guy (to leave a project). You either do it or you don't." His employees are willing to work multiple shifts needed to finish jobs. "If we tell you we're gonna get it done in 10 weeks, we get it done," sometimes that means sacrificing some of the company's profits on a job.

If a general contractor or developer consistently took advantage of the company's flexibility without providing extra compensation

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# Cochran & Mann Inc.

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for the resources, it would likely strain its relationship with Cochran & Mann. But Cochran has come to know many of his clients over 20 years of working in the business, so he has a good understanding with many of them.

"Respect starts with the employees. They know we work as hard as they do," he said. Recently one customer frantically called Cochran & Mann at 7 P.M. on a Friday night needing an emergency job done, and company's staff mobilized and completed the work without incident.

Cochran & Mann performs high-end commercial tenant build-outs, health care, hotel, retail and schoolwork, Cochran said. "We don't do maintenance



apartment-type stuff," or residential work, he said. "We won't say 'no' to too many things." The company does the same quality work if it's a \$1,000 job or a \$1 million project, he said.

The company's painters and paperhangers specialize in difficult work, such as painting multiple finishes using an array of products: "Zolatone, Scuffmaster, Duraplex,

Epoxies, wallcoverings of all types, are everyday finishes for us," Cochran said. "We don't do too many off-white eggshell jobs anymore," he joked.

One of the company's first large difficult jobs occurred six years ago when it had to chemically strip an Alexandria building with a metal façade roof as a part of a paint restoration. The company needed a creative solution

because city's ordinances allow contractors to make very little noise or create dust in doing renovation work. "We didn't know how to do it," including how to bid for the work, Cochran recalled. "We were apprehensive," but ultimately succeeded with the project.

A sandblasting and repainting job at Union Station right off the Amtrak station platforms a dozen

years ago also gave Cochran & Mann something of a baptism by fire. "It was something we inherited, and it propelled us," to success, Cochran said.

In 2000, Cochran & Mann completed an eight-month, \$1.4 million job for the Ritz Carlton at 2200 M St., N.W. The job featured 50,000 yards of wall covering and the equivalent of 20 miles of painted woodwork. It was double the size of Cochran & Mann's largest previous project. "It looked great when we were done," he said with some satisfaction.

Recent large projects have included interior and exterior painting at the Mitre Corp. headquarters building in Northern Virginia, a six-story office edifice. Cochran & Mann

also painted the new 14-story Capital One office building and 9-story garage in McLean. The company's just completing the multi-use Georgetown Incinerator project off the Whitehurst Freeway. This is Georgetown's new Ritz Carlton, Loews Theatres, fine dining and high-end condominium project.

Cochran & Mann received the 2000 subcontractor of the year award from the Associated Builders and Contractors of Washington, and the Metro Subcontractors Association has nominated them as a finalist for 2002 subcontractor of the year, with the celebrated winner announced at the "Subby Awards" banquet event expected in late February.



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