



Yachtworks DROPS ANCHOR

In Gulf Shores, AL

PHOTOS BY JEFF TESNEY PHOTOGRAPHY

Celebrating its 50th year in business, in January 2009 Saunders Yachtworks expanded its operations from Orange Beach, Ala., to Gulf Shores, Ala., with the opening of a new corporate headquarters. The new 15,000-square-foot headquarters building is the first of three phases for the 6-acre facility, located at Mile Marker 155.5 of the Intra-Coastal Waterway at the new NorthHarbor Yacht Center. The multi-use two-story building combines sales and administrative offices; marine engine and equipment shop; and a full service parts department and warehouse. The facility had to be ready for heavy traffic and a variety of vehicles and equipment displayed on the sales floor, and capable of handling heavy lifting and sometimes messy repairs in its shop. As company headquarters, the building also had to be attractive and welcoming. Concrete fulfilled each need.

“There are a lot more choices in concrete now...”

The office building portion of the new facility encompasses two stories, with 5,000 square feet per floor. It utilizes slab on grade foundation, and the second floor is constructed with concrete on a metal deck. The shop and warehouse areas are metal construction, but feature a band of concrete block along the bottom for both aesthetics and for protection against the elements and to stand up to the heavy workload. For beauty and interest, split-face block and colored split-face block were used on the exterior walls. The building also incorporates a combination of deck bond and running bond in addition to the split face.

“Concrete offers a lot of versatility, while still allowing a project to be low-maintenance,” says Linda G. Snapp, AIA, Lead AP, Vice President, Clark Geer Latham & Associates Inc., which has provided multi-disciplined engineering, architectural and planning services

throughout the continental United States since 1974. “There are a lot more choices in concrete now – lots of types of split face block and colored blocks give us a chance to add accents and break it up. Split face on the bottom and colored above also helps with maintenance so you’re not constantly painting,” she says.

“The availability of the concrete pavers and blocks has increased dramatically in last 10 years in both colors and textures, becoming one of most commonly used architectural and engineering choices when you’re also trying to create an aesthetically pleasing environment,” agreed Thomas E. Latham, P.E., President of Clark Geer Latham & Associates.

The use of concrete block also helped the building to meet the area’s environmental standards, which dictate that a building must withstand wind loads in excess of 140 mph. This is for protection in the event of a tropical storm or hurricane. Additionally, concrete can hold up to the day-to-day environmental concerns of a coastal





location, where the building will constantly be exposed to salt water and high levels of moisture, which provide a particularly corrosive environment.

“We definitely had to have a very sturdy building and had to meet all the hurricane codes that were required,” said John Fitzgerald, President of Saunders Yachtworks. “Concrete block turned out to be a very cost-effective and successful way to meet those codes. I can’t even remember looking at other choices,” he says.

Inside the building, the architects and interior designer chose stained concrete floors for the sales and main building reception and entrance areas. Colors complemented the other design details of the building, and additional interest was added by scoring the floors for texture.

“They tend to have a lot of traffic from people coming directly off

boats and into the offices and onto the sales floor, so the stained concrete holds up nicely to that, where shoes may be damp or people track in salt and sand,” Snapp says.

The stained concrete floor is perhaps one of Fitzgerald’s favorite features of his new headquarters building. “We really like the concrete floor,” he says. “The scored concrete came out looking very sharp, and it’s something people comment on when they come in. The stain color was worked out with an interior decorator, so it works very well with the other colors in the building. And, it was inexpensive to do that, as opposed to other flooring, which is definitely a plus.”

A concrete floor also was utilized in the shop area. This was necessary to provide a floor that is strong enough to withstand the weight of heavy boats and lifts. The floor is treated with a non-

porous seal, to help prevent oil and other fluids from the engines from sinking in and corroding or damaging the floors. This adds to their longevity.

Future phases of development at this site will include a full service boatyard with capacity to dry dock 100+ feet vessels. This will complement Saunders’ existing boatyard and facilities in Orange Beach, Ala., which can dry dock vessels up to 70 feet.

Clark Geer Latham is currently in the design phase for the dry

dock basin and dry dock boat repair yard. The repair yard will have about an acre and a half of reinforced concrete to support the boat lift – basically a lift that hauls a 115-120 foot boat onto a concrete pier with precast concrete piling. The boat then travels to the boat yard, where it is washed down then taken into a slip for repair. The load is equivalent to a 122,000-pound wheel load – or equal to 747 airplane, Latham says.

“The whole site is being developed to be a full-service boat yard,” Fitzgerald explains. “The most impressive part to me, from my point of view, is when you can build the piers and support this 150-ton travel lift, and the columns that you’re going to run that lift over for the next 50 years, that’s really sturdy stuff. You have to count on it for a long time, and a lot of weight over that time and a lot of high-dollar traffic. We have concrete caps on our yard in Orange Beach and they’ve held up really well.”

The basin also will have a reinforced concrete wharf, and there is a proposed cast-in-place channel to assist with drainage into the viaduct basin, with architectural stacked block walls and landscaping to enhance the appearance. “It’s going to be pretty nice,” Latham says. “While this is an industrial area, it’s also the company headquarters, so we want it to be aesthetically pleasing and work together.”

Additionally, Saunders Yachtworks eventually will have a building in the boat yard for a shop, observation area and storage area that will complement the headquarters office. Phase 2 will be constructed adjacent to the existing offices. Construction is expected to begin around the first of the year and will probably take 15 months to complete.

Saunders Yachtworks is proud of its tradition of performance and integrity. Founded by the Saunders family in 1959, the company first served the commercial vessel segment of the business, entering the yacht repair business 25 years ago. Today, it strives to be the Boatyard of the Future. ■ Wendi Lewis

