



RMT Construction & Development Group, LLC has completed multiple gallery renovation projects for the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, including a recent \$2.4 million renovation project that included demolition, carpentry, electrical, flooring and other interior finishes.

THE STRENGTH OF DIVERSITY

RMT Construction & Development Group, LLC builds relationships, community

by Susan Diemont-Conwell

RMT Construction & Development Group, LLC (RMT Construction) believes diversity is a cornerstone for success. "We employ people from all over the world, and three of our leadership positions at RMT Construction are held by women," says CEO Warren Thomas. "This talented and diverse team of employees does the heavy lifting around here. They are our biggest asset."

RMT Construction, headquartered in Richmond, Virginia, is a general contracting and construction management firm that provides commercial and residential construction management services, design-build construction, renovations and facilities management services to clients throughout Central and Northern Virginia, as well as the Hampton Roads region. "Simply put, our employees are the reason behind our success," adds Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer Robert Skipper. "We are one of the fastest-growing construction management firms in the Richmond area."

RMT Construction serves public and private clients, including state, federal and local government, as well as K-12 schools and universities. Its



RMT Construction & Development Group, LLC is led by (from left) CEO Warren Thomas, President and CFO Starlena Thomas and Executive Vice President and COO Robert Skipper.

Luxury Residential division teams with real estate developers, real estate agents and a host of residential clients that come by referral only. "Many of our customers are repeat clients. Our team is particularly adept at managing complicated and difficult projects," Warren says.

A STEP UP

Warren has always been a problem-solver, he notes. When his wife, Starlena Thomas, who is also the

company's Co-Founder, President and Chief Financial Officer, was pregnant with the couple's son, Warren became concerned that the loose bricks along the steps and stoop of the couple's townhome posed a tripping hazard. After several calls to management went unanswered, the trained mason went to the brick supply store one Friday evening and corrected the issue himself. Warren then issued an invoice for his services to management, expecting

ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF RMT CONSTRUCTION & DEVELOPMENT GROUP, LLC



For North Star Early Childhood Educational Center, RMT Construction & Development Group, LLC completely renovated a 39,000-square-foot former church building, transforming the space into new classrooms, a gymnasium, staff areas and a state-of-the-art kitchen and cafeteria.



RMT Construction & Development Group, LLC serves public and private sector clients, including K-12 schools and universities.

them to turn down the bill. Instead, the townhome's management contracted Warren to repair the remaining steps and stoops in the neighborhood.

"That's how this business was born," Warren says. The company began in 2003 as a specialty masonry contractor, but it quickly grew in size and scope. "Our clients began to request additional services, and we evolved into a full-service general contractor and construction management firm in 2007."

In those early years, the company's "office" was a diner on West Broad Street. "Warren and I estimated projects and discussed the day's work over bacon and eggs," Robert says. Starlena managed the company's bookkeeping and other financial and administrative needs, and Robert and Warren put their boots to the ground in search of work.

Even through the Great Recession, RMT Construction remained hard at work building its client base. After outgrowing its first official office in the financial district of downtown Richmond, the company moved to North Chesterfield in 2012, only to outgrow that space just a few years later. In 2017, the company moved to its 5,000-square-foot headquarters to accommodate its ever-growing staff. With up to 30 full-time employees, the company expects to reach \$20 million in gross sales in 2020.

RMT Construction is not only licensed in general contracting but is also the only general contractor in the Central Virginia market to hold mechanical, electrical and plumbing licenses and to have a licensed Certified Professional Estimator directly overseeing the company's Preconstruction division. "Clients benefit greatly from these designations," Robert says.

BREAKING DOWN WALLS

Working in a male-dominated industry can pose challenges to women in the field, according to Director of Construction and Senior Project Manager Tyeshia Turner, who manages RMT Construction's Project Management division. "You do sometimes get second guessed by men you come across, but Warren and Robert have created a supportive culture that has helped me grow as a professional," she says. "They are protective of their employees and have helped build my confidence when it's been shaken. And they empower me to make my own decisions on projects. Their unwavering support helps me step boldly into this field."

“Simply put, our employees are the reason behind our success. We are one of the fastest-growing construction management firms in the Richmond area.”

Robert Skipper, Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer,
RMT Construction & Development Group, LLC



Executive Vice President and COO Robert Skipper (right) and Senior Superintendent Yves Hairston review project plans.

Tyesha started as a Project Coordinator in 2012. Warren and Robert encouraged Tyesha to broaden her expertise, giving her new roles and responsibilities. “I had never really thought about getting into project management—especially in this field—but to grow in this industry, you have to break down those walls.”

Roula Saba, Director of Business Development and Preconstruction Manager, experienced similar encouragement and mentoring when she joined RMT Construction a year and a half ago. “First off, when I interviewed with Warren, I could tell he was a very ethical person. That was important to me. Secondly, Warren and Robert are role models. We can

see how hard they work on a daily basis, and it inspires us to want to grow and prosper. It’s not just a job. We want to do well and contribute to the success of the company.”

As with Tyesha, the leadership trio spends time training Roula and exposing her to different parts of the industry. “I’ve been working alongside our preconstruction department and becoming more involved in the field of estimating,” she says.

SPIRIT OF COLLABORATION

According to Warren, the company’s relationship with subcontractors is as important as employee and client relationships. “Each person and each trade are equally important on a project. They are our partners, and we encourage them and mentor them into becoming the best in the business. Their success is our success,” he says.

That spirit of collaboration fuels the general contractor in all its project work and is especially evident in fast-paced projects like the 5,000-square-foot auditorium renovation at Dominion Energy’s headquarters in Richmond. “The project involved a complete demolition of the existing space,” Robert says. RMT Construction was tasked



RMT Construction & Development Group, LLC managed the demolition of an existing structure and prepared the site for a new 4,000-square-foot pre-engineered metal building with all the finishes, including mechanical, electrical and plumbing, for the Virginia State Police.

with outfitting the auditorium with high-end architectural finishes and moldings, a fire suppression system and a sophisticated audio/visual system—all in time for an employee town hall meeting with the company's Chairman, President and CEO, Thomas F. Farrell II.

"We had to coordinate the manufacture and delivery of materials from outside the U.S. It was a very fast-paced project with a hard deadline that couldn't be missed," Tyesha says. Thanks to great collaboration and teamwork, RMT Construction completed the project within the six-month timeframe.

The company's commitment to creating a smooth construction process makes it a general contractor of choice for the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts in Richmond. "For our first project, we completed a 7,500-square-foot, \$2 million renovation project in one of the art galleries. We were working around historical artifacts and priceless works of art," Robert says. The client was so impressed that RMT Construction has completed an additional five galleries.

RMT Construction is also a trusted contractor for the Capital Region Airport Commission. "We have renovated several terminals at the Richmond International Airport, which has led to follow-on work with airline companies," Warren says.

The firm often works with educational institutions, understanding the need to complete work within the summer season, when students are on break. For North Star Early Childhood Education Center in Stafford, RMT Construction created a 39,000-square-foot space for the school's Early Head Start program. The company converted a building

previously used as a church to create multiple classrooms with technology upgrades, a multipurpose area and a state-of-the-art kitchen.

BOOTS ON THE GROUND

The team at RMT Construction is proud of its involvement with Rebuilding Together Richmond, which has an annual goal of creating warm, safe, dry housing for up to 50 elderly and low-income Richmond residents and families each year. Warren and Robert both started in the trenches with Rebuilding Together as house captains leading construction crews, and the leadership duo have both served on the board of directors for the nonprofit. "Warren and I spent a lot of time with our grandparents while we were growing up," Robert says. "So to create a home that helps a senior adult continue to live independently is very rewarding."

"This year, we'll be returning to where it all began, with boots on the ground. I can't wait," Warren adds.

In addition to its work with Rebuilding Together, the firm has provided financial support to many other organizations, including Virginia Union University's (VUU) Legacy Awards Gala, VUU's Samuel DeWitt Proctor School of Theology, Westminster Canterbury Foundation and the Claude Moore Charitable Foundation and Virginia Interfaith Power & Light.

"The more we succeed, the more we give back to the community," Warren says. "We're not just out to build a building. We invest in building relationships and in building our community." 🐾

With more than 20 years in the communications industry, Susan Diemont-Conwell works with companies, nonprofits and individuals to produce stories and publications that move and inspire.