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## California Construction

### Feature Story - May 2004

#### Feet to the Fire in Fresno

##### Matt Seals Cuts Teeth on Major St. Agnes Expansion

*The project manager for Visalia-based Seals/Biehle General Contractors inherited a stalled segment of a major expansion of St. Agnes Medical Center in Fresno. Seals said keeping the trades focused on the schedule will result in a late-November delivery of the expansion's largest component, a 232,000-sq.-ft. heart and vascular department.*

*By Paul Napolitano*

Five years removed from the tranquil college life at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, Matt Seals, the project manager for Seals/Biehle General Contractors of Visalia, has the task of keeping a formerly maligned project on schedule.

Seals' project, the \$100 million expansion of St. Agnes Medical Center in north Fresno, will nearly double the 250,000-sq.-ft. hospital.

The Office of Statewide Health & Planning Development last summer halted construction of the three-phase project, which began in 2000 and was scheduled for completion in December 2003.

The initial architect, the Stichler Group of San Diego, is no longer working on the project.



PHOTO COURTESY OF SEALS/BIEHLE GENERAL CONTRACTORS.

"I prefer not to say why the project was stopped nor why the Stichler Group is no longer on the project," said Ted Beshwate, the project manager for owner Trinity Health, the fourth-largest Catholic health-care system in the United States.

Los Angeles-based RBB Architects replaced Stichler on the project in July 2003. The original construction manager, ProWest PCM Inc. of Temecula, was dismissed in September 2001 as construction manager of a \$65 million, 232,000-sq.-ft. expansion of the heart and vascular department.

"It's been quite a challenge, but a great learning experience," said Seals, who has worked for the general contractor since he graduated with a degree in political science in 1999.

Matt's father, Steve Seals, and Steve Biehle, both of who previously worked for Fresno-based Palmo Construction, established Seals/Biehle in 1993. Seals/Biehle was the general contractor for the expansion's first phase—a 900-space, \$8 million parking structure and the structural steel and concrete portion of a \$10 million cogeneration plant. The firm replaced ProWest as construction manager for the heart and vascular department project in October 2001.

Located about 15 mi. north of downtown Fresno, St. Agnes Medical Center was originally built on Herndon Avenue in 1975 as a 75-bed facility.

When Seals/Biehle became the construction manager for the heart and vascular department last year, Seals inherited a project that had 600 instruction bulletins (changes to the original contract), was 12 months behind schedule and needed a new set of drawings.

"RBB Architects has done a great job of updating the contract documents and communicating on a regular basis with OSHPOD," Seals said. "The project manager, Kevin Boots, visits the site twice a week. RBB has the kind of health-care experience that is necessary on a large, complex project like this one."



Seals said his biggest concern since taking over as construction manager has been keeping the trades on track for the expansion of the heart and vascular department.

"We reigned it in and kept all of the prime trades focused on the schedule despite all of the previous change orders," he added. "That's not an easy thing to do when you're dealing with about 45 trades on a multi-prime project."

*PHOTO COURTESY OF SEALS/BIEHLE GENERAL CONTRACTORS.*

Phase two will be completed in early December. It also includes a 50,000-sq.-ft. expansion for the catherization

laboratory department, which has been completed by Seals/Biehle, serving as general contractor.

"It's been difficult getting [the heart and vascular project] back on track," said engineer Dennis Enns of Fresno-based New England Sheet Metal, the mechanical engineer of record for the project. New England Sheet Metal has worked for St. Agnes for 15 years. "Matt gets hit from all sides, but he is doing well keeping track of everything," Enns added. "We've all had to play a lot of catch-up."

The project's third phase includes a seismic retrofit of the existing medical center and infill tenant improvement on 40,000-sq.-ft. of space. The \$12 million phase has not been scheduled.

Seals said a major contributor toward the progress made on the heart and vascular department has been the work of Turlock-based Partition Specialties, which has a \$4 million contract for dry wall, lath and plaster and metal stud and exterior framing.

"They've done a great job helping with the modifications on contract documents and keeping the owner's standards," Seals said.

Terry McSweeney, project manager for Partition Specialties, was equally impressed with the performance of Seals, who will wed college sweetheart and current Seals/Biehle employee Gina Machado on May 15.

"Matt works very well under pressure," McSweeney said. "He's done remarkably well."

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