

Hamilton Project Engineers – They Do Everything!



Aaron Standeford



Karl Stelljes



Reid Highberger



Craig Almont

What are the responsibilities for a project engineer at Hamilton Construction? For the answer to that question, we asked Hamilton’s most senior Project Manager Steve Brown to explain and, never one to disappoint, Brown sums it up simply: “They do everything. That’s why a good project engineer is so important. Because if they are good at what they do, than the project manager doesn’t need to do anything.”

While perhaps a bit of an exaggeration, Steve’s point is a good one. The role of Project Engineer (PE) is absolutely crucial on every Hamilton job. They are without question, the Project Manager’s wingmen. The demands are so rigorous that more often than not, the PE position is the proving ground for future Project Managers.

So who are these up and comers? What makes them tick? The Herald reached out to find out more about the men behind

the RFI’s. This month we are focusing on Aaron Standeford, Karl Stelljes, Reid Highberger and Craig Almont.

Why did you choose to work at Hamilton?

Aaron: At the time I graduated (2007) construction was booming and we all had multiple job offers. I’d interned at Hamilton and there were several things I liked about it: Hamilton is very hands on and I get to wear a lot of hats. I like being a real part of building a bridge. I kid my friends that went into commercial construction that they have to spend most of their time picking out carpet colors and counting door knobs.

Karl: I had always wanted to build bridges and this being Hamilton’s core – that peaked my interest. Then they hired my friend Pat Prescott, who kept bragging about all the cool things he got to do. So luckily – Con (with a little help from Pat) remembered me when the hiring needs came around.

Reid: Growing up in Stayton, OR I always knew of Hamilton and always heard good things and how well respected a company Hamilton is within

the industry. So when I decided I wanted to build bridges I knew exactly what company I wanted to work for!

Craig: I interviewed with Bob Hirte and immediately liked the culture and felt it would fit me the best compared to the other companies I interviewed with. I like that Hamilton is focused in the Western United States.

What is the one thing about you that no one at Hamilton knows about you:

Aaron: That Brittney and I are expecting a baby in January!

Karl: I am an open book – everyone knows everything

Reid: I started my first year in college in the Pre-Med Program. One day I woke up and thought-what in the world am I doing??—and went over and switched my major to Construction Engineering.

Craig: I paint, as in fine art type painting-acrylics and also do pencil sketching. (See Craig’s artwork on p. 4.) I designed the art for all my own tattoos.

What is your favorite part of your job?

Aaron: The thing I like best about Hamilton is that it is not overly structured. There are expectations but they let us manage things the way we like as long as we are getting the desired results. There are a lot of expectations placed on you right from the start. You gotta hit the ground running from Day One. Favorite project: Sandy! The bridges have turned out beautifully. They ride out beautifully. Overcoming the struggles of Sandy and having it come out so well make it my favorite.

Karl: Honestly, my favorite part of the job is when the crew lets me help pour concrete or form something up with them,

even though they go back over my finish work. It’s fun to get out and work side by side with the guys who do it every day. I would have to pick WRB as my favorite project. I was able to work with a lot of the seasoned staff, crew, supers, PE’s and PM’s. It was great to see them in and action and learn first-hand from them.

Reid: Every day is new and presents itself with new challenges. And of course the people I get the opportunity to work with. I don’t know how I could pick a favorite project. I have worked on four different projects since I started, three of which include WRB, Sandy and now Newberg-Dundee. I think a person would be lucky to work on ONE of those projects in their entire career!

Craig: I like seeing things going from broken down to new in a short duration. I like the planning aspect because then when you see a plan fall into place and it all works – that’s the favorite part of my job. My favorite project was the one in Idaho where I was coaching and won the NRA award. The other 16-17 jobs I’ve done would be my next favorite. ■

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Project Engineers Part II:
Mark Sitz, Jordan Marks, Austin
Dukowitz and Kyle Belha

What is CM/GC? Why is Hamilton so darn good at it? And why care?

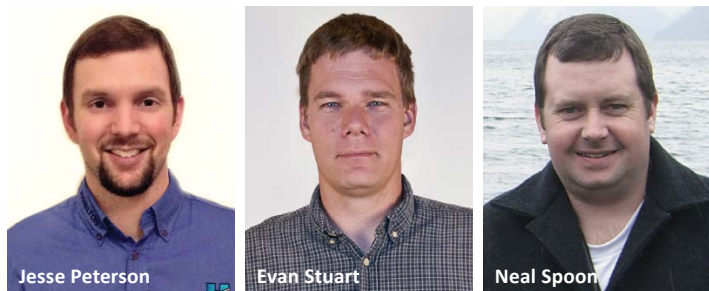
CM/GC

CM/GC or the Construction Management/General Contractor model of delivery is a process where the owner selects and partners with a contractor and designer to manage the design and construction process. Unlike Design/Build where the owner hands over the project to the design/construction team, in CM/GC the owner stays very involved in the process throughout the entire project. With CM/GC all information is shared openly between the partners. The contractor agrees to “open book” pricing where the owner can see all the detail that goes into pricing decisions, how scheduling decisions are made and more. Hamilton has emerged as a popular choice for this form of delivery. In 2008, ODOT selected Hamilton as its first CM/GC contractor to build the largest bridge project it had ever undertaken: the I-5 Willamette River Bridge (WRB). Then, the State of Alaska selected Hamilton as its first CM/GC contractor for the high profile Riley Creek Bridge project at the gateway to Denali Park. Shortly after, Bend Parks and Recreation picked Hamilton as its CM/GC for the multi-faceted Colorado Dam Safe Passage project.

The outcome of WRB was a huge success: the project delivered four months early and \$12 million under budget.

Can Hamilton replicate its success with these other CM/GC jobs?

The Herald checked with three Hamilton employees who are now deeply involved in Hamilton’s CM/GC jobs to get the answer: PM’s Jesse Peterson and Evan Stuart; and Chief Estimator, Neal Spoon.



Herald: Jesse and Evan, where are you in the process with the Riley Creek and the Colorado Dam CM/GC projects and how is it going?

Jesse: We’re in the final stages of the pricing and developing the 100% cost proposal. We started the process in May 2013. Since then we’ve looked at different design options and did forward cost analysis on some of those. We looked at different bridge lengths and span lengths and a variety of alternatives.

Evan: We’ve completed design review and are in the final stages of pricing as well.

Herald: Can either of you give a couple examples of decisions that came as a result of design review or forward cost analysis?

Jesse: Sure – a simple example had to do with the cost of abating girders. The old girders on the Riley Creek bridge were painted with lead paint. We did a cost/benefit analysis of abatement (removing the paint and re-using the girders) vs. scrapping them. We demonstrated to the owner how Hamilton would own the risk of abatement—the cost impact of that. Ultimately the owner could see why it made

more financial sense to sell the girders for scrap. It was a real learning experience for them.

Evan: One example of a change based on our constructability input: We’ll be using sheet pile rather than rock to isolate two of the Deschutes River channels from each other. The result will be more permanent and that had value for the owner.

Neal: I would say the biggest eye opener for both our owners in Alaska and Bend is the level of detail contractors go through when they price out work. Both owners now see that we don’t just go to a pricing manual and pull out a number. When they see all the variables we factor in for weather, material cost fluctuations, potential site conditions—it gives them confidence and helps to build trust.

Time and again, we seem to be owners’ first choice for CM/GC? Why do you think that is?

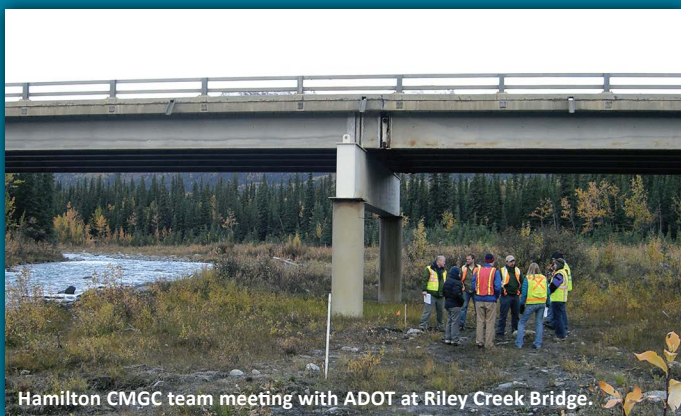
Evan: As a corporate culture, Hamilton has always tried to be relationship based. Before alternative contracting, we used informal avenues to build relationships—like offering to do design reviews at no charge. CM/GC merely formalizes the preconstruction review process—so it’s not significantly different for us. It’s a change for the designers—they have to

be more responsive to our suggestions so it might actually be more difficult for them.

Neal: Even in a low-bid world Hamilton has always been about the relationship. So as different as the processes are, our approach is still consistent. And through the years we’ve selected people who fit the culture. When Evan Stuart walks into the room, who’s not going to like Evan?? Really, how can you not like Evan? He’s not afraid to look at things outside the box. Owners are used to contractors who have a “status-quo” fixed style and that is certainly not Evan. Evan enjoys the creative process. Owners love that willingness to explore their ideas.

Same with Jesse. In Alaska, you’ve got to understand that you are either Alaskan or you’re an outsider. Jesse is definitely seen as an Alaskan—so he paves the way for us to bring outside points of view. He brings a sincerity to his effort—it’s more than just being honest and that has been a key trust bridge builder.

Neal: The other key to success in CM/GC comes down to chemistry. I would encourage any owner considering CM/GC to spend face time with their potential contractor/partner. You just simply have to like and have a mutual respect for who you are working with. ■



Hamilton CMGC team meeting with ADOT at Riley Creek Bridge.