



A milling room in the Knight Industries' main building required a durable flooring base before machinery could be installed.

Below, dozens of munitions bunkers on the property were finished with Sherwin-Williams masonry and concrete systems.

Reed Knight didn't exactly toast his good fortune the fall day in 2001 that he bought a 450-acre manufacturing complex with a 454,000-square-foot main building for his booming company.

"That was the day I drove out the front gate of the facility, pulled over and threw up," says Knight, the CEO of Knight Industries, a 200-employee government weaponry contractor in Titusville, Fla. "I knew the shear magnitude of what we were up against and I was that nervous about it."

Some 30 months later, Knight's innovative firm is bustling at the site. And Knight has received an education in the do's and

don'ts of painting and flooring to rival that of any contractor.

RECLAMATION PROJECT

What Knight was up against that first day was a building that had sat unoccupied for seven years since the previous tenant, a major aeronautics firm, had moved out. That Knight was even looking for such a building is something of a story in itself.

In 1980, this fourth-generation local citrus farmer parlayed a passion for firearms into business as a tiny research and development contractor for the U.S. government's counter-terrorism operations. Late in the 1980's, Knight's only client asked him to begin manufacturing the equipment he was developing and Knight set up shop in a 65,000 square-foot building in Vero Beach. With the advent of the first Gulf War in the early '90s, Knight's shop was running round the clock, but when that conflict was over, he was forced to downsize. Then the tragedies of September 11 in 2001 caused the government to again ask Knight to ramp up his production — and do so quickly.

Knight couldn't meet the demand working out of the Vero Beach facility and after considering expansion, went shopping for a new home for his business.

"We had offers from Georgia and other places that wanted me to bring my employees

ON HIS O

Major plant renovation is an in-house job at Knight Industries



to their location,” says Knight. “But the local government here got the governor involved and really made it possible for us to move in here. More than 2500 jobs had walked away from this place when the previous tenant left. They wanted to get somebody in here.”

But since the previous occupants had left, leaks had developed in the roof of the main building. The leaks, combined with seven years of general neglect and a lack of maintenance, meant practically every surface on-site needed to be cleaned and refinished, and some required greater repair. Furthermore, the concrete flooring in much of the building was crumbling.

“All I could see was the magnitude of the job we had in front of us,” says Knight. “The building had really fallen into significant disrepair.”

ASSESSMENT

Step one for Knight was to thoroughly assess and prioritize the needs of the building and the grounds.

“We came up with a plan,” he says. “Since the roof leaks were causing interior damage, the first thing we had to do was put a roof on it.”

Roofing went smoothly, and led to job two, which was painting and re-flooring the parts of the facility that would be immediately occupied,

AT A GLANCE

**Knight Industries,
Titusville, Fla.**

- 454,000-sq-ft main building had been vacant 7 years
- 450-acre property
- Completed renovation project with self-hired personnel



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“The sheer magnitude of the job we had in front of us... that’s what made me nervous...”

Reed Knight



Flooring is both durable and easy to maintain in production areas at Knight Industries.

or about 250,000 square feet of the 454,000-square-foot main building.

Here's where Knight made a decision that didn't surprise those familiar with Knight's hands-on, proactive management style. Rather than turn the task of refinishing the ceilings, walls, piping, tanks and floors to an experienced contractor, he decided to buy a BlasTrac unit, all other necessary painting equipment and hire a four-person paint crew of his own.

"I am the ultimate micromanager," says Knight in explaining the decision to in-house the painting tasks. "But what I had to consider is that there's a building frenzy going on in this area and a lot of the local contractors are well booked. They looked at the size of the project and said, 'This is really going to cost.' They didn't look at ways they could save money."

So Knight went forward on his own, partnering with Sherwin-Williams to provide Dryfall for ceilings inside the plant, industrial enamel and epoxies for structural steel, most interior surfaces and more than six miles of chain-link fence, Loxon systems for on-site masonry and General Polymers floor systems for the plant floors.

The result was an education.

LESSONS LEARNED

"I would do it the same way. We got a reasonable price from Sherwin-Williams and

they convinced me that they would take responsibility for making the right decisions on paints. And they have.

"And by using our own people instead of a contractor, we saved enough money that we were able to upgrade to a better floor in a lot of situations. We did some interesting things with floors, using flakes and different grips.

"But I would have hired better-trained people to manage this process," he adds. "I was naive about what we needed. For example, there were some areas in which we didn't prepare surfaces properly. And we have temperature issues and humidity issues here all the time that we should have dealt with better.

"But these are lessons learned. We'll be smarter about a lot of things when we do the other half of the building."

For now, Knight isn't sure about the future of that half of the building. At this point, his business doesn't need it, and he doesn't feel compelled to address painting and flooring issues immediately, given that the damage from the leaking roof has been contained.

The unoccupied half of the building might even house a painting and flooring business some day, according to Knight.

"When I bought the BlasTrac and all this equipment, I was going to get into the business as a contractor," he says. "But the manager of such a business needs more skills than I originally thought they needed. If that person comes along, I might do it yet." ▣