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Fortune-Johnson General Contractors

By Fernie Grace Tiflis
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Headquartered in Atlanta, **Fortune-Johnson** specializes in high-density housing that is broken down into four market sectors: apartments, student housing, senior housing and condominiums.

Partners Brett Fortune and Lee Johnson originally met while working at the Atlanta-based apartment developer Calibre Companies in the early 1980s.

When the apartment market fell apart in the late '80s, the duo decided to join together to pursue a different venture. "Our early experiences prepared us for our current expertise," notes Fortune, principal.

"When we started Fortune-Johnson 17 years ago, we were primarily doing retail and restaurant construction, as well as small office buildings and fire stations. Although we enjoyed retail, we knew we could excel at multifamily because that's our expertise.

"Then, in 1993, the apartment market came back strong, and there were several developers with no in-house construction services," Fortune continues. "So they hired us. We did a job for The Cannon Cos., and that kind of gave us the kick-start. With years of solid experience in the multifamily area, we went back to what we knew.

"So, that transition was pretty easy. And, [finding clients] was not hard because we had developed relationships when we were at Calibre."

Meeting Expectations

Today, Fortune-Johnson has projects in Atlanta; Washington, D.C.; Nashville, Tenn.; and Raleigh and Charlotte, N.C. Ninety percent of its work is with repeat clients, including Georgia-based companies such as Archstone, Isakson-Barnhart and Newport Development LLC.

When asked what distinguishes Fortune-Johnson from its competition, Fortune responds, "The true answer would come from our clients.

"Our goals are to far exceed the standard in our product, performance, service and relationships. It is something that the company is constantly working on.

"Regardless of which Fortune-Johnson team and which location, we want our repeat clients to expect we will consistently deliver these goals."

The company works on seven to 10 projects at a time.

Its current projects include:

- Ashton Hills – A \$20 million 225-unit apartment in Atlanta
- Campus Crossing – A \$20 million 201-unit university housing complex at Emory University
- Westchester at Contee Road – A \$60 million 453-unit apartment in D.C.
- Westchester at Rockville Station – A \$35 million 192-unit apartment in D.C.
- Westchester at Town Center – A \$66 million 491-unit apartment in D.C.
- Circle at Southend – A \$49 million 360-unit apartment in Charlotte, N.C.
- North Hills East – A \$58 million mixed-use community in Raleigh, N.C.

All Aboard

The Atlanta Business Chronicle listed Fortune-Johnson as the eighth fastest-growing private company in the city in 2007. The prior year, the company was ranked No. 37. "Fast growth is only good if it's manageable," Fortune says.



Fortune-Johnson specializes in high-density housing, and has completed projects in Atlanta; Washington, D.C.; Nashville, Tenn.; and Raleigh and Charlotte, N.C.



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"That's why we put a strong emphasis on having the right people, who are well-trained in the Fortune-Johnson way."

The company's main focus right now is expanding TEAM (Training Everyone Absolutely Matters), its in-house training program launched earlier this year.

TEAM offers a series of classes, including sessions in framing, sheet rock, finish, job management and administration. "This process will ensure our clients receive consistent performance on every job we do for them," Fortune stresses. "It's a very in-depth training that our employees go through."

In addition, the company says it believes in:

- Teamwork with clients and employees;
- Providing [high] levels of performance;
- Long-term relationships; and
- Accomplishing goals and objectives as a team.

Positive Attention

Every two years, The Associated Builders and Contractors (ABC) of Georgia has a competition where companies can submit projects in different categories and compete with other builders and contractors. ABC looks at the quality of products and relationships with owners, architects and engineers.

Fortune-Johnson received an award of excellence from the ABC of Georgia for its work on Glenwood Park. Completed in 2006, the \$8 million mixed-use project in Atlanta was built for Green Street Properties.

Glenwood Park, a large urban development that boasts more than 400 residences, includes 50 luxury condominium units and 50,847 square feet of retail space. Located two miles east of downtown Atlanta, Glenwood was designed with an old-fashioned downtown feel, Fortune recalls.

"The developer [Green Street Properties] worked to create a thriving old town center concept where residences are directly above the retail spaces," Fortune states. "Its goal was to create the era when merchants lived above their shops."

The project was built on an industrial brownfield site, Fortune says, which was a challenge. "One of the greatest challenges faced on the project was negotiating the unforeseen underground conditions existent in a brownfield site," he says.

"These conditions required the removal of a substantial amount of debris and unsuitable materials in order to prepare the site for construction."

Despite the obstacle, the project was completed successfully in 2005 and received "a wealth of positive attention," according to Fortune.

'Wow Factor'

Other Fortune-Johnson projects that received ABC's recognition include Westchester Dunwoody, which is a 400-unit \$25 million dollar apartment complex, and 700-bed University Place student housing facility.

In addition, Fortune-Johnson received a NHBA Award for Excellence in Senior Housing for Park Springs located in Stone Mountain Park, Ga.

The facility encompasses single-family units, duplexes, villas and assisted care housing with all the upscale amenities.

"It's the wow factor," Fortune says. "[These recognitions] give us the confidence that our goals to build quality buildings and have great relationships with our clients are being achieved. We made up our minds early on that we were going to be honest and fair in our business dealings and decisions.

"We strive to treat our clients in a way that they will actually feel we are part of their company – as if they have their own in-house construction company."

Focus on the Now

Fortune-Johnson is looking forward to expanding geographically, while continuing to build its people from within. "TEAM is our big initiative right now," Fortune stresses.

"Our overall product is all about the skill and integrity of our people.

"Both my partner and I agree that we want to have a dynamic, excellent construction company that glorifies God for generations to come.

"We try to act and conduct our business in line with those values."

At the end of the day, Fortune notes, Fortune-Johnson is happy with its success. "We are thankful that we have several outstanding clients that continue to give us opportunities in a strong, high-density housing market," Fortune says.

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