



'Faster Estimating' Is a Constant Pursuit for Arizona's Number One Contractor

Bill Corbin got his start in construction in 1950, as an electrical apprentice; he founded a company in 1975. Today, Corbins Electric of Phoenix, AZ, usually has 250 field employees at work on large projects, service work, and more. Mark Fleming, President and CEO, has led the company to noteworthy heights (see accompanying story).



John DePace ensures that estimators at Corbins Electric know how to estimate faster and get the data they need.

In July 2002, the company hired John DePace as Senior Estimator, with responsibility for overseeing the database, junior estimators and getting new estimators up to speed. He is now Corbin's Pre-Construction Manager. Fifteen to 20 people access Corbins' estimating system daily. DePace's job includes making sure they know how to do it faster and easier and get the data they need.

It's a challenge, but John keeps smiling. His background includes roughly 19 years of computerized electrical estimating for several firms, including the now-defunct Encompass Services and the still-vital Cupertino Electric. Included on his resume: 31 years in the electrical industry...including four as a McCormick Systems employee!

While DePace may have fond memories of his McCormick days, that's not why Corbins Electric has a Win 12000 system in place. "McCormick has the fastest system on the market for day-to-day use," he says. "It allows us to bid more jobs in the same period of time as other systems.

"...I still miss Jack and Todd, though!"

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McCormick Holiday Hours:

Dec. 24—6 a.m. to 3 p.m. (Mountain Time), Closed on Dec. 25 and Dec. 26.
Dec. 31—6 a.m. to 3 p.m. (Mountain Time), Closed on Jan. 1 and Jan. 2.

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Sharing the Know-How

Estimators, project managers, and service department system personnel must know how to use the software to best effect. With nearly 20 people filling such jobs, you might think John would be training constantly—but Corbins is *most definitely not a revolving door!*

"In the 16 months I've been here, we haven't had a lot of new people," he admits. "You know, this is a good place to work. It's pretty hard to get in here!"

When someone new is added or an employee is promoted, first stop is the standard estimating class at McCormick's Chandler, AZ headquarters. (Note that classes are also held regularly in Maryland.)

"If they have some basic computer knowledge and take the basic class, I can bring them up to speed," DePace says. "I'm teaching classes for our employees every month. It's not just McCormick, but also Excel, Primavera SureTrack, and related software.

"We use McCormick's scheduling program for specific needs, but we often export the estimate or temporary assemblies into an Excel file, and then import it into Primavera. When the customer needs a professional-looking Gantt-type format, Primavera is the best choice.

"And the great thing is, with what I've learned, I can show our people how to do this in about one-half hour."

What an Expert Might Do

Let's say you had spent four years selling estimating software to contractors, teaching classes, and helping electrical estimators solve problems. What "secret knowledge" could you bring to bear?

One contribution DePace has made, he says, is to integrate regular use—a standard approach, really—of assemblies into Corbins' estimating process. It's easy to do with the software, he says, and the company nets advantages. "It's helpful when you have

estimators who might not be fully experienced working on a job," he notes. "It makes our estimating process faster—and more accurate.

"More-experienced estimators review the bids, of course. At this point, we bid almost entirely in assemblies."

Another effort is to integrate McCormick software with a specially developed export spreadsheet approach (his own), and to use assemblies. The output: **Unit Prices**. Some general contractors demand them.

"This applies to highway work and specialty contractors," he says. "They want unit pricing. The spreadsheet allows us to quickly manipulate the data from the estimate, put overhead and profit on it, then cut and paste the numbers right to the bid form."

Meeting the Speed Need

You might have noted that DePace's comments are all about *speed*. It takes a lot of estimating to grow a com-

pany that has 250 electrical workers! If the work can be done faster, the company can add sales without increasing estimating department overhead.

That, he says, is why Corbins Electric appreciates the recent V7.1 update to its estimating software: "McCormick's DOS version had a feature, 'save price and labor,' that was great. With this new version, they've brought it back," he notes.

"Now, I can change the prices of material, price, and labor—and not change the database. I can do it right in edit extension. It saves the information, and it never gets changed by Trade Service. That has tremendous value to us." ✕



A Bit About Corbins Electric

Mark Fleming, president/CEO of Corbins Electric, has worked for the company during 17 of his 27 years in electrical contracting. Here's a short list of awards—limited to this millennium:

- ✓ **2003**—Corbins was named "Subcontractor of the Year" for Arizona by the American Subcontractors Association (ASA). Arizona Business magazine also ranked it as the state's Number One electrical contractor. Additionally, Bill Corbin received the "Innovator of the Year" award from the ASA in 2003. The company founder was also honored with the 2003 Pioneer Award from the Construction Financial Management Association.
- ✓ **2002**—The Business Journal of Phoenix bestowed its Corporate Excellence Award on the company.
- ✓ **2001**—Mark Fleming was named Executive of the Year by the Arizona chapter of the American Society of Safety Engineers, which cited the strong safety culture at Corbins Electric.

On safety: Company policy is to provide each new hire with a safety orientation. Then the potential new employee **must** pass a safety quiz. If he or she answers 17 of the quiz's 20 questions correctly, the hiring process continues.

If 16 or fewer are correct, the hiring process stops. The individual is invited to come back for the next scheduled company safety orientation—after which there's another chance to pass the test.

What happens if this process results in two quiz failures? Corbins Electric does not hire the person. He or she will be permitted to return and try again...but only after a 90-day wait.

According to company executives, the Corbins Electric E-Mod rate of .59 is the result of a constant stress on safety...which, obviously, begins on the day an employee is hired! ✖

User's Conference Dates Set—Please Mark Your Calendar!

Contractors and estimators will gather in mid-April at the Tempe Mission Palms Hotel in Tempe, AZ, for the 2004 McCormick User's Conference. Please scratch out this space on your schedule, as McCormick customers who have attended tell us they come home with ideas, tips, hints, and more. The key: Knowledge transmitted at this event—by both our staff and the other attendees—helps them become more productive and accurate in their estimating!



A quick look at the schedule:

- ✓ April 19-20—pre-conference Training classes (Both standard and advanced classes are scheduled!)
- ✓ April 21—Golf tournament, followed by our evening Opening Reception
- ✓ April 22-23—Conference Days (our on-site computer lab available all day)
- ✓ April 24—Lab open in morning for additional user questions and instruction

To register, please call us at 800-444-4890 and ask for Loriel McCormick or Jody Dougherty. ✖



Look for McCormick at the BICSI Winter Conference (www.bicsi.org) on Jan. 12-15 in Orlando, FL, and at Electric West (west.electricshow.com) on Feb. 2-4 in Las Vegas, NV.

Estimator's Corner

Modifying the Extension Reports



On screen Extension allows the modification of job items. "What if?" scenarios and job modifications are *simple* and *easy*. Pricing may be saved in a file format for future use, allowing jobs estimated today to be looked at in the future using the same pricing. This month's column continues with likely extensions.

- ✓ If not already included, users may want to modify their extension formulas or create new Extension Reports for Edit Extension as follows:
- ◆ "Edit" Price 1 & Bid Labor by Cost Code" Add "Book Price" and "P/Adj 1" after "Quantity".
- ◆ "Edit" Price 2 & NECA 2" Add "Book Price" and "P/Adj 2" after "Quantity".
- ◆ "Edit" Price 3 & NECA 3" Add "Book Price" and "P/Adj 3" after "Quantity".
- ◆ "Edit" Price 2 & Bid Labor by Cost Code" Add "Book Price" and "P/Adj 2" after "Quantity".
- ◆ "Edit" Price 2 & CO 1" Add "Book Price" and "P/Adj 2" after "Quantity" also add "Bid Labor" and "CO Lbr/Adj 1" after "Ext Price 1".
- ◆ "Edit" Price 3 & CO 2" Add "Book Price" and "P/Adj 3" after "Quantity" also add "Bid Labor" and "CO Lbr/Adj 2" after "Ext Price 2".

By adding these fields, the "Book Price" column and "P/Adj 1", "P/Adj 2", or "P/Adj 3" columns would be added. This allows the user to see the "Book Price" and adjust "Price 1", "Price 2", or "Price 3" by adjusting the multipliers "P/Adj 1", "P/Adj 2", or "P/Adj 3" accordingly. By adding "Bid Labor" and "CO Lbr/Adj 1" or "CO Lbr/Adj 2", the labor fields "CO 1" or "CO 2" may be adjusted accordingly.

Note: Some users may not have all or may have different Specification fields than those shown above. If you have questions regarding the reports available to you, please call McCormick Systems' Technical Support department. ✕

Next month: *Checking Extension Labels and Modifying Prices.*

Get Windows Training Now!

Standard Estimating

The class is structured to take you from "Job Startup" through " Bid Summary". It provides in-depth instruction, including good manual experience and "brush-up" exposure for those who want to get more out of the product.

Advanced Management

Designed for the database manager or chief estimator, this class drills down into the bottom of the program. You will learn how to build specification formulas, write reports and reports formulas, and more. Before taking the class, you should be proficient in all takeoff phases of the product and understand your company's needs.

Upcoming Schedule

Unless specified, all classes are at the training center in our office in Chandler, AZ. Classes start at 7 a.m. and wind up about 4 p.m. daily. We make hotel reservations using information from the registration forms sent in from participants. We must receive your registration form in order to reserve a space in our class. To obtain a registration form, call 800-444-4890. ✕

Chandler, AZ

Standard Estimating
January 7-9 & 28-30
February 18-20 & 25-27
March 17-19
March 31-April 2
April 19-20 (pre-Conference)
April 28-30

Advanced Management
January 21-23

For information about classes in Maryland, call 800-444-4890.