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# Profiles

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# Building Fresno State's Jordan Ag Research Center

## Making construction a positive experience

If you've ever gone through major construction or remodeling, you know it can be a difficult task. Strangers on your property, congested traffic, inspectors, sawdust, decisions, changes; it can be quite daunting and stressful. Or you can handle it like the Facilities team at Fresno State on a recent project – with mindfulness, experience, and great decision-making on the fly – helping a big project get built – on time and on budget. It's amazing what a difference great people can make.

You may have noticed Fresno State's newest 3-story building on Barstow and Woodrow Avenues. It's a world-class, 30,000 sq. ft. agricultural research center for staff, students and researchers. The areas of study for the new center include agriculture, pests and insects, plants, sensory evaluation, natural resources, food, water and more. Complete with laboratory spaces, interaction areas for collaboration, classrooms, and it even has a tasting room that changes color. This is the first laboratory of its kind in the CSU system.

Harris Construction was chosen as the builder for this unique project. Anthony Aguilar, Director of Estimating for Educational Projects at Harris, was given the task of "value engineering" the project plans – to find ways to reduce costs so the Center could be built within the budget set by Fresno State. Aguilar specializes in estimating costs of building Educational and Civic facilities. He received his Construction Management degree from CSUF in 1993.

"Part of my job is to collaborate with the subcontractors and staff to find substitute products or construction methods – sometimes differing from the architect's initial concept – to help cut costs without disrupting the integrity of the design," said Aguilar. "After considerable research, we discuss the cost reduction ideas with the client and let them choose the items they want. We do this for all of our clients, but I have to say, the

team at Fresno State really knows what they are doing. They were committed to problem-solving and staying on schedule. They were really good decision makers which helped us move the project forward, one of the best groups of people I've ever worked with – knowledgeable of construction, and they knew the campus VERY WELL (including all of the existing utility locations) which really helps us do a better job building for them."

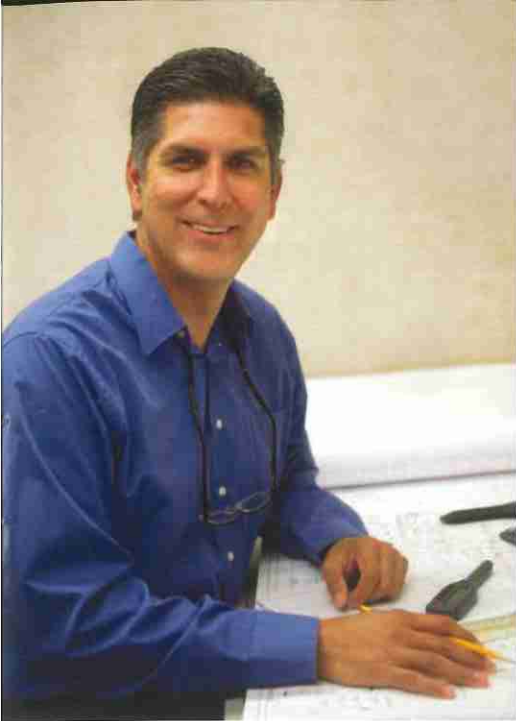
Another Fresno State Construction Management graduate on the project team was David Gonzales, Class of 2014. Gonzales was the on-site Project Engineer during construction, keeping track of changes, costs and conflicts in the design. "For me, this was an exciting project. Plus, it was like going back to school every day," said Gonzales. "We could hear the marching band practicing, see the school farm in action, had horses walking around the jobsite, there was never a dull moment. We also gave a lot of tours. I especially liked seeing the Construction Management students and professors touring the project. It's great exposure for the students – to learn the fundamentals in their classroom, and then walk over to our active jobsite and see what it's really like in the field.

"Another thing I enjoyed was working with the Fresno State Facilities Staff. At Harris Construction, we always look out for our customer's best interest – and Fresno State understood that. They formed such an open and honest relationship with us that I found myself looking forward to our weekly meetings with them. That mutual respect and dedicated level of open communication helped us all get through the construction process – including some major changes mid-project. Things like changing the entire interior design color palette, re-designing the window trim so birds would stop nesting there (thank you Harris Superintendent Jim Timmons!), finding solutions to increase the water pressure – all were tackled (and solved) on-site through this open coordination between Harris Construction and Fresno State. A lot of people put their heart and soul into this project being a success."

Another Harris team member on the project was Mitch Graham. He started on the project as a Foreman doing direct work with the building's foundation and concrete work, and then was promoted to Assistant Superintendent – providing a watchful eye on quality control and coordinating all of the trades.

"We work at being safe and productive on our jobsites," said Graham. "We encourage and reward safety through 'Safety BBQ' luncheons and while on the Fresno State project we were able to enjoy numerous luncheons – a thank you to our subs and staff for keeping the project safe. Even the owner of Harris Construction, Richard Spencer, and his son, Michael Spencer, President and CEO of Harris Construction came to the jobsite for tours and the Safety BBQs. I think having our management team behind us is incredible, encouraging a safer work environment and acknowledging our successes.

"The management backs us in other ways too and we appreciate that support in the field. Our Senior VP of Field Operations, Bill Bunch, was often on the Jordan project site, checking that everything was going well, and he would be there at the drop of a hat if we needed him on other days, too. He has been in construction for almost 40 years, and he's a great guy



Anthony Aguilar



David Gonzales



Mitch Graham

– knowledgeable, calm, whatever we're doing he's been there and knows just what to do. I've been in construction since 2003, and most of that time I've been with Harris. Having Bill's added years of experience helps me be a better superintendent, which ultimately helps us deliver a better end product to our clients.

"Ryan Diel, now Chief Operating Officer at Harris, played a huge role in the success of the Jordan project. He helped put together a great team for Harris for the project, plus he's been in construction management for over 20 years. Being able to watch and learn how to collaborate with subcontractors, project owners, and even our own team members from someone with his experience for me has been great. Everyone on our Project Team including Fresno State's Team was on the same page and communicated well, which helped a job of this type and complexity run smoothly."

Jim Timmons, Project Superintendent on the CSUF project, always likes it when management comes through one of his projects. "It makes us feel like a real team," said Timmons. "We have a good group at Harris, better than other construction companies. And working with the Agricultural Foundation and Fresno State people was great. Their team talked, asked good questions, and made decisions on the spot. I like it when decision makers are right there in the daily grind – just like our management – showing up and being there makes all the difference in the success of a project."

"Our project team had great camaraderie on this job, too. We bring together different people on each project and this group meshed really well. We even met for lunch offsite once a week (usually at the Dog House Grill, of course!) for team building. We lived and breathed that project – together – and we are proud of the way we built it. Plus our main goal was met – we made the Facilities Staff at Fresno State happy, too."

Ryan Diel added, "The CSUF staff made the construction process a great experience for everyone involved. Their facilities team included Debbie Adishian-Astone (Now VP for Admin. & Assoc. VP for Auxiliary Services), Bob Boyd (Associate VP for Facilities Management, now retired), and Gary Wilson (Sr. Dir.

of Facilities Management, also retired). Debbie's leadership kept the team focused on the end goal. Bob's knowledge and common sense allowed the team to move through obstacles timely and efficiently. Gary's straightforward and reasonable professionalism was something not common in this industry. Knowledgeable clients like Debbie, Bob and Gary truly understand construction and what it takes to build a first-class facility. Because of this, plus their passion and trusting relationships with the Harris Team, the work product was only strengthened, never compromised.

"Our newly configured management team at Harris – including Mike Spencer (President/CEO), Cole Bendoski (VP, Project Mgmt.), Bill Bunch (Senior VP, Field Operations), Terry Barritt (General Supt.), Matt Davies (Director of Preconstruction), Brent Ridgeway (Dir. of Estimating for Dairy, Food Processing, Industrial and Healthcare), Anthony Aguilar (Dir. of Estimating for Educational and Civic Facilities), Tim Thornton (CFO), and myself included – have the experience, personalities, and knowhow to take Harris and its customers to the next level. I'm proud to be on such an outstanding team, and our customers benefit from our 200+ years of combined construction/management experience. We are honored and thankful to work with so many great Facilities people across Central California."

In order for the construction process to go smoothly, it takes good people. If you are planning to build a facility of any kind, hire a firm you can trust, put a good team of your own people in place that understands construction, that knows your property inside and out, who will be ready for changes on the fly, and include knowledgeable decision makers who will be part of the construction process every week. Your builder should have caring and capable employees, who help make the daunting task of construction hassle-free for you. They should be a collaboration of talented people building exactly what you want (and need), using skill and craftsmanship every step of the way, who take great pride in what they build, and do it all safely, on time, and on budget. Building new facilities should be a positive and rewarding experience for everyone involved.