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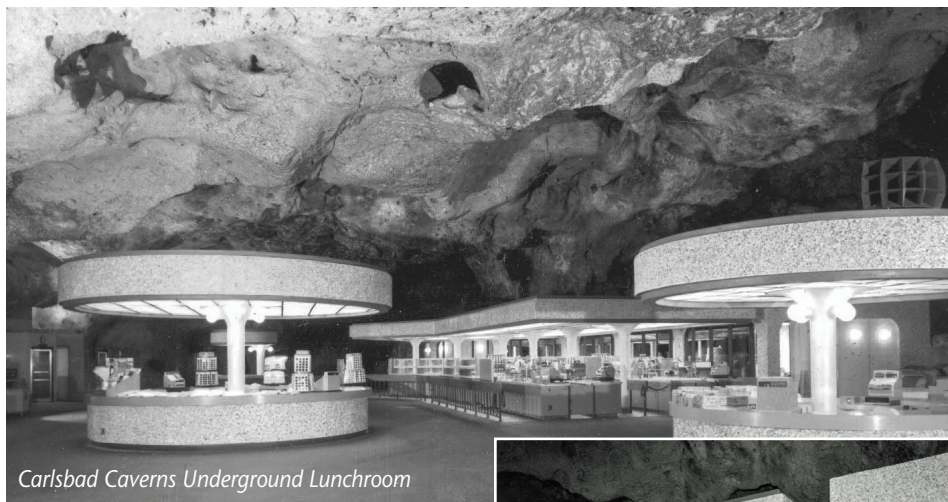
Grooving and Growing: The Sixties and The Seventies

by Hap Richardson

Although the first few months of 2020 were off to a rough start, we have still been enjoying looking back over our company history and celebrating our 70th year. This is the second part in a four-part series about Richardson & Richardson. You can log onto our website to view past articles.

The 1960s in Carlsbad started with a minor boom. The AEC (Atomic Energy Commission) selected Carlsbad as the site for Project Gnome, an underground nuclear test blast designed to investigate production of molten salt and high temp steam for possible power production. If you are interested in learning more about Project Gnome, Wikipedia has a great article. This project provided many work opportunities for local construction companies, and our company built several things out there, including the secure entrance and guard facility. The only bad thing about the project was that the site was right in the middle of some of the best dove and quail hunting around, so of course there was grumbling in Carlsbad about that.

A few years later, things changed drastically in the community. The price of potash (at the time, Carlsbad was the largest producer of potash in the U.S.) had started dropping. The mineworkers staged a strike, the companies were hurting anyway and couldn't pay any more raises. Consequently, the entire mining basin collapsed economically. Businesses closed. Hundreds of out-of-work miners had to leave town, leaving their homes behind. At one time there were 500-to-600 foreclosed homes, and jobs related to these provided the only work for local construction companies. My job as a teenager was to help clean up and do minor repairs at these abandoned homes. Great lesson.



Carlsbad Caverns Underground Lunchroom

My experience there was a huge help years later when we were awarded the renovations to the Old Albuquerque High School, a beautiful 1918 building which sat empty for nearly 30 years.

Eventually, business got better and the early 1970s saw us complete the new Valley Savings and Loan building, the remodel of Commerce Bank and Trust, in a space that was the oldest hardware store (1900) in town. In the mid-70s, the company was awarded a contract to remodel the 750-foot Underground Lunchroom at Carlsbad Caverns. The original lunchroom was built very early on in the park's history and all of the cabinets and fixtures were made of concrete, which they mixed on site and poured. A side note: the Caverns is a constant 56 degrees with about 95% humidity, near perfect conditions for concrete curing.

After "curing" for 40 years or so, the cabinets were so strong the surface would "ring" when hit with a sledge and the first order for our crew was to demo all the existing. Since it was deep in a cave, we could use no power equipment other than electric. About that time, a motorcycle



gang came through and they needed work, so we put them to work with sledge hammers. One day was all they could handle.

All the materials had to be either brought in on the 3-mile natural entrance trail or down the service elevator. We used the elevators. Long items were worked up through the ceiling hatch and secured. All concrete came down in manual Georgia Buggies. During construction, we were warned that, though this was 750 feet underground, there could be some artifacts uncovered. One day, our crew found some old bones up into a rock area where we were tying into for office walls. What sort of bones could they be? Find out in the next installment, when we'll also visit the 80s oil Boom (and bust), and one of the largest projects in New Mexico.



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Construction and COVID-19

Here in New Mexico, we were lucky to have a less harrowing coronavirus caseload than many states. As we go to print for this issue, our state is still under restrictions. By early March, we were practicing social distancing and encouraging good handwashing and health practices on the job and in the field. Masks for the guys in the field to wear all the time and additional safety training followed shortly after.

Our official stay-at-home order was issued on March 23, and the construction industry was classified as "essential," so we were able to keep our team working without any layoffs. Our office staff moved to a "skeleton crew," with a number of

us working from home. We also began using Zoom to do video conferencing, for both our weekly staff and client meetings. This time has also accelerated our use of Procore project software, as it is a reliable and accessible project tool.

We had a number of projects cancel and a handful put on hold, but we are looking forward to the projects we do have scheduled when we are all clear

to open up the state for business. When looking over the good, our team agreed

we have all learned a lot of new, valuable technical skills. We were encouraged by how adaptable and flexible our team, our clients and our subcontractors are. We were also cheered by the many acts of kindness we saw in our city and our industry. We hope you are all safe and healthy as well.



Hap gives Bob an "Attaboy" for a compliment he received from one of our subcontractors...at an appropriate "social distance."



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What's Happening?

R&R recently finished up an addition to **Western United Electric's** warehouse in Brighton, Colorado. The Brighton job was a 24,000-square-foot addition to an existing tilt-up warehouse. We used a Butler® pre-engineered steel system with textured, insulated walls and MR-24 roof to meet the current energy code, which can be expensive on tilt-up. The Butler building was a good solution as well because there was little room to access for a tilt-up addition. We are also completing a new façade for the **Lowe's** customer support call center, and an apartment remodel for **Blue Sky Property Management**, both here in Albuquerque. We were recently awarded a contract for a new stage for **St. Stephen's Methodist Church**, and the design-build **All Saints Orthodox Church** has moved into the permitting phase.



Western United Electric, Brighton, Colorado



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