



Summit Building Services, LLC provided rough carpentry framing on this 175,000-square-foot student housing project near Grand Valley State University in Allendale, Michigan. Scheduled to be completed July 2018, the project includes multiple apartment buildings, a clubhouse and a pool.

THE IMPORTANCE OF STRUCTURE

Summit Building Services, LLC
Delivers Customized Framing Solutions

by Meredith Wargo

Commercial buildings come in all shapes and sizes, from upscale mixed-use developments to high-rise hotels to leading-edge health care facilities. But without the art of rough carpentry as their starting point, none of these myriad and complex projects turn into reality.

Recognizing both a need and an opportunity to deliver quality craftsmanship in wood-frame construction, Daniel J. Kiefer founded *Summit Building Services, LLC* in 1998. “When my father started the company, we were doing small remodeling projects,” says Nathan Kiefer, Chief Operating Officer of Summit Building Services. “Today, we’ve morphed into a family-owned-and-operated framing contractor framing contractor with offices in

Michigan and Florida. We average close to one million square feet of rough framing each year on large commercial projects throughout the eastern United States.”

BUILDING FROM THE GROUND UP

Rough carpentry involves the basic framing of a building, including the walls, floors and roofs. In simple terms, it’s the building’s skeleton—the most important structural component of any facility.

“One of the things that sets us apart is that we’re big on practical experience,” Kiefer says. “In our industry, there are a lot of people who lack the necessary skills to build things. Three or four years ago, we decided to focus on hiring people who have practical construction experience. It

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Daniel J. Kiefer, President and CEO of Summit Building Services, LLC, founded in 1998. Daniel has more than 25 years of experience in the construction and real estate development industries.



As Chief Operating Officer, Nathan Kiefer uses his practical experience gained from the field and applies that knowledge to the company's projects and management. He is also responsible for customer sales.



Brian Taylor, as Vice President of Operations, is responsible for all site superintendent accountability as well as coordinating projects' scope of work with customers and their representatives.



Sales Manager Rodney Maurer, with a background as a residential builder and a commercial superintendent, skillfully oversees any phase of a project.

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————— Nathan Kiefer, Chief Operating Officer,
Summit Building Services, LLC



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"With proper training, anybody is teachable in terms of technology," explains Rodney Maurer, a Sales Manager who has worked for Summit Building Services since 2011. "But when you come from the trade, you have a better understanding about what's needed to get the job done. All of the company's owners cut their teeth in the trenches. Because of everybody's hands-on experience, we have an innate ability to work with our subcontractors and general contractors to resolve problems as they arise."

Summit Building Services employs 18 full-time management and field staff. Its subcontractor base ranges between 60 and 85 personnel, most of whom are carpenters. "More than half of our subcontractors are people whom I met when I worked in the field years ago," Kiefer says. "Although we continue to foster new relationships and expand our subcontractor base as the economy and our workload requires, most of the guys who work for us now are the same guys we worked with in our early days."

WORKING TOGETHER FOR SUCCESS

This year, Summit Building Services celebrates its 20th year in operation. Both Maurer and Kiefer recognize the importance that relationships have played in the company's longevity and success.

"We're proud of the fact that we survived when the economy was down," Maurer says. "Times were tough and we had to lay off a few people, but fortunately we've been able to rehire them."

And while Kiefer is grateful that the company survived some difficult times, he's quick to point out that the company went through a period where it grew too quickly. "Today, we are

very attuned to growing at a certain pace. It's hard to provide good customer service if you grow too fast. Something gets lost along the way. Because our company's reputation has been built on solid relationships and delivering projects on time and within budget, that's not something that we're willing to risk," he says.

"We're pretty humble," Kiefer adds. "If you met us in person, you would see that we're just everyday family guys who are trying to make a living. There are certain challenges associated with running a family business. At the end of the day, we've learned to make it work, which has been very rewarding."

THINKING OUTSIDE THE BOX

In addition to monitoring its growth, Summit Building Services seeks innovative ways to differentiate itself from its competitors. The company owns approximately \$1.2 million to \$1.5 million worth of construction equipment that it can provide on job sites, if necessary. "If any of our subcontractors are experiencing financial hardships or if they can't provide the right equipment, we use our own equipment to avoid any project delays," Kiefer says.

The company also conducts drone flyovers of all its job sites. "Using drones enables us to document the construction progress," Kiefer explains. "We use the videos to show our clients how long it took us to frame their buildings instead of just talking about it."

Providing onsite supervision for every project is another important component of Summit Building Services' culture. "Our superintendents are an added cost to our company, but we think they're vital to our success because they enable us to have eyes and ears on the project at all times," Kiefer notes. "We equip our superintendents with mobile laptops and tablets so they can create daily progress reports from the site. If we see things that are falling behind, we can mobilize a crew in a short period of time to get the project back on track."



The Berkshire Muskegon, located in downtown Muskegon, Michigan, is a three-story senior apartment complex for residents 55 and older. Summit Building Services, LLC provided rough carpentry framing on the 92,000-square-foot building.

"One of our strengths is job site management and workflow," Maurer adds. "If we get a call from a general contractor who tells us his project is in trouble, we can move some guys around and get him the help he needs in two or three days. We pride ourselves on being the replacement contractor for many projects."

Approximately half of Summit Building Services' portfolio comes from repeat clients, while the other half comes from work won through competitive bids. "This is a tough business and—for the size of the contracts that we deal with—a lot of our work is about the numbers instead of a company's reputation," Kiefer says. "The advantage of working with repeat clients is that we can privately negotiate and get to the price they need. For potential clients for whom we've participated in numerous competitive bids but without any success, when they state, 'We will connect with you on the next one,' I often ask them, 'If we can't get the first project, how can I show you what we can do for you on the second one?' "



Located in Grand Rapids, Michigan, Grand View Place is a new apartment complex that features spacious one- and two-bedroom apartments. Summit Building Services, LLC framed the four-story, 80,000-square-foot building in 60 days.

Southern Utah-based Meredith Wargo is a contributing writer with more than 30 years of experience writing for myriad industries.