



## Fox Excavating housing development near Sault St. Marie, MI

### Tough, lightweight concrete forms speed the path to profits

Fox Excavating, an 8-year-old site-contracting firm had grown by concentrating on sewer lines, utilities, water lines, and road building. Looking for new ways to increase revenue and profits, owners Mike and Paul Fox reviewed the work they were subcontracting. Mike Fox says, "We had always done the heavy, difficult stuff, but were knocking ourselves out estimating and bidding jobs. Then, we had won the bid, we'd hand over big dollars to the subcontractors, who got the business effortlessly." Sidewalks were at the top of their list.

One such project was a three phase housing development near Sault St. Marie, Mich. Funded by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the 177- home project is called Odenaang, which means "land of many hearts" in the Ojibway language. It provided an opportunity for the company to include the sidewalk placement in it's winning bid.

The owners began searching the Internet for the concrete forms they needed. Donna Smith, the office manager, located Metal Forms Corp., Milwaukee, which Mike Fox says was "one of the most interesting companies we found." The form manufacturer's capabilities



extend beyond it's name with it's newest product, Poly Meta Forms®, polyethylene forms for both straight and radius work. Fox explains, "Since they are made of polyethylene, they are light, and I knew that would be a big factor. But I didn't realize how important that was until we got them on the job."

"We estimated we would be profitable if we placed 500 feet of sidewalk per day," Fox explains, "but when we got started, we were averaging 700 to 750 feet per day, easily, with an inexperienced crew. On our top day, we laid 975 feet of sidewalk, 5 feet wide and 4 inches thick." He adds, "That means we can out down more then the big contractors, but we can bid with much lower overhead, which makes us very competitive."

These forms are light enough to set, strip, and reset three times a day without wearing out the crew. "It only took a short while for the men to become

familiar with the forms. Because we use a generic oil release agent, the forms clean themselves as we haul them to the next setup with an end loader or pickup truck.”

Fox says that, on a 115-foot pour, they often call the concrete truck before they start setting the forms. “It usually takes the truck about 30 minutes, and we’re set up and ready to pour when the truck arrives.” On the first phase of the Odenaang project, Fox reports that they poured for 10 days, with a couple of rain days, and completed 44,500 square feet of sidewalk. “That’s pretty good for an inexperienced crew,” he points out.

The contractor found added benefits as he got further into the project. “Before we used the Poly Meta Forms®, I was concerned that they would bow with the weight of the concrete, so we backfilled them with sand,” Fox recalls. “We quickly learned that it wasn’t necessary. They stay perfectly straight, just the way we pin them down. We’ve used the curved concrete forms for some pretty tight radiuses, and that also has been a big advantage.”

After the third or fourth day of pouring, the owner of the local concrete company came to see how work was progressing. “He said our inexperienced crew using the Poly Meta Forms® was producing as

well as his experienced crew with steel forms, so that made us feel pretty good.”

Fox sees the forms’ durability as an added savings. “We set them between two and three times a day, so in the first phase of the project, they each saw 20 or 30 uses. They take some abuse, but they aren’t showing any wear yet. I think they’ll easily go the 100 or more pours we’ll make to complete the three phases of this project.” The forms have made it easy for the company to take on more work and keep the job moving faster. Workers can begin when they are ready and don’t have to wait for subcontractors.

Most importantly, the company already is showing increased profitability. Fox explains, “Because we are pouring some pretty good footages per day, we are being more competitive. Also, instead of making 10 percent on a subcontractor, we are making more like 20 percent. That’s a pretty good swing onto the bottom line.”

Fox concludes, “When you consider how much sidewalk we poured the first time we used the Poly forms, how our profits went up, and how our crew wasn’t all worn out after stripping and pouring all day long, I’d recommend these forms to any contractor.”



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