

# WESTLAND CONSTRUCTION MARKS 25 YEARS



Led by the Houghton family, the Orem-based GC is among Utah's Top 10 general building contractors with annual revenues over \$175 million.

By Brad Fullmer

Westland executives include (left to right): Lynn Hawkins, CFO; Todd Houghton, VP Southwest; Kyle Houghton, VP Marketing & Business Development; Stan Houghton, President; Chris Houghton, VP Operations; Nick Slye, Vice President Preconstruction. (by Dana Sohm) (Main image) The firm completed the \$12 million Revere Health Multi-Specialty Health Center in Salem in 2016. (courtesy Westland)



In the midst of Utah's brutal 1980s building recession, Stanley (Stan) Houghton Jr. and his brother Dale of Orem-based Houghton Plaster ventured west to work for a general contractor in sunny California and ended up pursuing significant projects for three years in various SoCal markets, including Los Angeles, Santa Barbara and San Diego. But when the industry suddenly

turned south in that market in 1990-91, Houghton said three large general contractors they were working for went bankrupt on three sizeable projects, leaving the Houghton's unpaid on those jobs and wondering about their firm's ability to survive long term.

"We knew we needed to get to a market where we could better watch the money and be more in control of when

the money is coming from the owners," said Stan. "We felt like we could do general contracting work as good as the people we were working for, if not better. We decided if we were going to go broke, we were going to come home to Utah."

So Houghton, now 62, became a general contractor and founded Westland Construction in 1992, with Dale taking over all operations of Houghton Plaster.

The firm has established itself as a major player in several thriving local markets, including K-12, Religious, Healthcare and Retail. (courtesy Westland)

At the time, Houghton's children were still in school, but eventually his sons Chris, Kyle and Todd would follow in their father's footsteps and they currently serve in executive positions with titles of Vice President: Chris, 41, oversees operations; Kyle, 38, is in charge of business development; Todd, 34, directs the firm's Southwest office in St. George.

The company has experienced tremendous success during its first quarter-century as a general contractor, and is grateful to be celebrating its 25th anniversary during a robust economic time of record growth and overall revenues. That said, the memories of Houghton's three-years working remotely, and the overall stress it caused – socially and financially – won't be forgotten anytime soon.

"That was hard for my family," recalled Kyle. "Dad worked in California a lot of my childhood...it was challenging for us, but he always taught us the value of hard work and treating people right, and the rest follows. He still outworks us today."

### Roots Steeped in Ambition

Houghton and his sons are quick to point out that their success is due to the influence of family patriarch Stan Houghton Sr., who moved to Utah from Los Angeles at age 18 and found a niche working in plaster initially before founding Houghton Tile in the 50s, which Houghton said was his father's main source of revenue during his childhood. Once Houghton and his brother graduated high school they starting working full-time in the family tile business, and quickly saw opportunities to expand its expertise – and even return to Stan Sr.'s roots – to include tile flooring, plaster and stucco, drywall, metal stud framing and structural steel



fireproofing trades. Houghton credits his father's work ethic, coupled with his profound generosity, for creating a family standard.

"He was one of the most kind, caring men that I have ever known," said Houghton. "He was always so considerate

of others, dependable, honest and trustworthy as ever. He taught me the principles of hard work and to always treat people fair – and that quality is more important than how you end up financially on the project."

Houghton himself gets the same

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praise from his children, which illustrates how values and ethics are being transferred generationally.

"I had many opportunities to work hand-in-hand with my dad on projects, but (his influence) is more that as you establish core values, you realize people are the most important thing," said Todd. "Dad was good about helping us realize that it's people first, and money later."

"Too many companies put a goal on a number; our goal is to provide a good work environment and solid careers, and to work with solid clients," added Chris. "We strive to have happy clients and happy employees."

### **Religious, K-12, Healthcare Markets Key to Growth**

That steely focus of putting people first – not just in work but in life – has

taken on even greater meaning for the Houghton family in recent years as the firm has built various temple projects for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS Church) in the U.S. and internationally in remote areas of the world.

Westland's strong relationship with the LDS Church dates back to its beginnings in the early 90s as it completed several LDS meetinghouses during that decade, and ultimately landed its first temple project in 2000 on a renovation of the Monticello (Utah) temple. Since then, the firm has renovated/is in the process of renovating temples in countries including Haiti, New Zealand, Fiji, and Canada, along with building a brand new temple (the firm's first) in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Witnessing the vast cultural differences between their home in Utah and the third world countries

they're working in merely intensifies the importance of their mission and positive impact these special projects have on local communities.

Since August, Houghton has been directing the DRC temple project in the capital of Kinshasa, a city with 11 million people, in a nation with unemployment rates that have hovered around or over 50% for decades. He spends 4-6 weeks at a time in Kinshasa to ensure the work progresses on schedule, then comes back to Utah for a week or so before going back on the road and repeating the cycle. His past experience as a plaster/drywall/tile subcontractor has certainly come into play.

"A year ago in September our lead man in Africa had a grand mal seizure and because of political unrest I was the only other person with a visa in and out of the country, so I had to go back and get >>



Stan Houghton Jr. (far right photo, hand on hardhat) consults with local subcontractors on a new LDS Temple project in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo. (courtesy Westland)



involved more day-to-day,” said Houghton. “It’s a tough place to work. We’re working with people and learning more about the culture and it’s been very interesting to me to see challenges to the degree of having to lead the subcontractors and show almost every trade how to do their work. We have to push them pretty hard...they’re not used to cranking and working hard all the time. A lot of my knowledge of what I knew growing up is paying off now, things my dad and others taught me. Ten years ago I would have never imagined I would be over there doing this work.”

Todd added that experiences gained working in these different countries and cultures are matchless.

“You come back from anywhere you go and realize that what you have is more than what most people have,” he said. “It’s hard to leave your family, but there are benefits and blessings that come with a willingness to sacrifice. You’re changing people’s lives physically, spiritually, emotionally...and you quickly learn when you have a common need, you don’t have barriers with different languages or cultures. At the common core, we’re allowing lives to be a little bit better.”

Beyond religious projects, Westland

has established itself as a force in Utah’s K-12 education market the past 15 years, and it has made steady inroads in healthcare this past decade.

The firm’s first go at a school project came in March 2003 on the renovation of Salem Elementary for Nebo School District, after literally seven-plus years of trying to break into the tight market. Chris said “with Salem (Elementary) we felt it was a ‘hometown’ district and it would be a good project to get experience on. We took a bath on that job, but we performed really well and it gave us the opportunity to do a CM/GC job on Payson High School. One job turned into two, turned into four, turned into eight, and from there it has exploded.”

“When we got that first school project, we said that we were going to do *everything* possible to make it shine,” added Kyle. “From there we were able to show other school districts what we had done and how we treated (Nebo) and that’s helped us grow.”

In the healthcare market, Westland completed the award-winning \$12 million Revere Health Multi-Specialty Health Center in Salem last year, and broke ground in September on the \$30 million Central Valley Medical Center in Nephi.

In the past three years, Westland

reported annual revenues of \$117.7 million (2014), \$148.9 million (2015) and \$178.3 million (2016) – a \$60 million jump, good for the No. 8 spot among Utah-based general builders in UC&D’s 2017 Top General Contractor rankings. Kyle estimated that 2017 revenues (the firm’s fiscal year ended September 30) will exceed \$175 million, and that Westland has \$250 million on its books heading into 2018.

Regarding the future, Houghton said he hopes to keep working full-time for another decade or so – he’s simply enjoying the industry too much right now – before turning over the keys full-time to the next generation.

“I would love to be involved in temple building the next 10 years; it’s something I love to do because of how special they are. If they can give me one project at a time, that would be great,” he chuckled. ■

**Westland Construction**

**Founded:** 1992

**Utah Offices:** Orem (HQ); St. George; Vernal

**President:** Stan Houghton Jr.

**Employees:** 110

**2016 Revenues:** \$178.3 million

**Projects completed:** 600+

**Markets:** K-12; Religious; Healthcare; Retail