



## ON REAL ESTATE BY DUANE SHIMOGAWA

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# Thom to open Hawaii Schnackel office

**S**haron Thom, who was most recently the head of Kiewitt Building Group's Hawaii office, has taken on a new job, leading the expansion to Hawaii of another Nebraska-based firm, Schnackel Engineers, she told PBN.

The multidisciplinary firm consults in the areas of mechanical, electrical, plumbing, fire protection and data technology. It already has four offices in the United States, in Los Angeles, New York, Seattle and Omaha, Nebraska. The Hawaii office is its fifth location.

"The core values of the company and of the people are not that different from the values of the people of Hawaii," Thom told PBN. "We want to bring this company and be a part of this community. We've spent a huge amount of investment thus far on this new office and we are committed to the community."

Schnackel opened its first Hawaii office in January, but has been working in the Islands since 2004, focus-



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**SHARON THOM,**  
Schnackel Engineers

ing on commercial work, with 86 projects under its belt, including Hookele Elementary School, Ala Moana Center's Ewa Wing expansion,

Ala Moana Center's Nordstrom expansion, Royal Hawaiian Center, Ward Village Shops and Bloomingdale's at Ala Moana Center.

"I've known and worked with Schnackel back when I was with General Growth Properties Inc.," said Thom, the former deputy director of the Department of Transportation Services for the City and County of Honolulu, who was GGP's director of construction for the Hawaii Region. "That's when I met them and I've talked to them on and off for years."

The company prides itself on its unique AEA Integration software, which it says gets projects designed and built more quickly and reduces construction costs, with long-term operating cost savings. On average, a client could see a savings in construction costs between 10 percent and 25 percent, according to Thom.

"There is no one else who has this type of technology," she said.

The new office is located at the

Ala Moana Pacific Center at 1585 Kapiolani Blvd., on the 13th floor, and although there are just a few employees working there now, the plan is to eventually have up to 15 people in the office.

"The goal is to hire from the talent force in Hawaii," Thom said. "With the amount of work we have had and with my interest in [heading up the office], they decided to open an office [in Hawaii]. Just looking at island capacity and what the different islands have to offer, we would love to open an office on Maui."

The Hawaii office will serve as a launch pad to Schnackel doing even more work in the Pacific Region, including in Guam, Tahiti and Samoa.

"Having this opportunity to take this firm and weave my personal philosophy and bring that to Hawaii is what we're really excited about," said Thom. "It's a great place to be based for the whole Pacific Basin."



## SPECIAL REPORT DESIGN BUILD

## Q&amp;A: SHARON THOM, SCHNACKEL ENGINEERS

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Sharon Thom, vice president of Nebraska-based Schnackel Engineers's Pacific Region division talked to PBN reporter Duane Shimogawa this week about design-build projects and the state of Hawaii's construction industry. ¶ Thom had been with Kiewit for since 2010 before becoming the Pacific Region lead for Schnackel, a multi-discipline consulting engineering firm that recently opened an office in Honolulu, in January. ¶ The firm has worked on such design-build projects as Hookele Elementary School, among others. (For more on Thom, see page 5.)

**Will Hawaii see more of these types of projects?** I think design-build is the wave of the future. Everyone wants their projects to get done faster, and this process allows projects to be completed faster. Instead of having a very linear process, you have this stacked process. Our firm works well in that environment. Our company philosophy is to be a team-player.

**What are the challenges in doing design-build projects?** You have to ensure that your team is working

together and how the different consultants and contractors come together and work together.

Dealing with personalities can be difficult. The expectation is that you will finish quicker.

When we work on a design-build project, we make sure we understand the expectations. There's no misunderstanding from assuming. There is no time to go back and redraw things. You have to make sure we are all on the same page.

For owners, it takes some of the risks of a traditional method of designing and building a project



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and puts it on contractors and designers.

**Where are the opportunities in the construction industry?** There are still quite a lot of projects that people in the industry are talking about. While maybe the high-end

condominium market is going to see a little bit of a blip, there is still a lot going on in the mid-range market. There is a ton of retail going on, such as DeBartolo Development's Ka Makana Alii shopping mall, International Market Place and Ala Moana Center. Hospitality will always be a strong market.

**When will the market begin to soften?** It could after 18 to 24 months. Usually, it takes a little bit of time. Construction will still be busy during this time. That will help carry the economy, but I don't think it will be as bad as in 2008. There are other levels of design of projects that are still very viable.

**What is it like being in a male-dominated industry?** I never think I'm amongst the boys. I just try to work hard and let my work and work ethic speak for itself. I never, ever said, 'Hey, I'm different.' I will try to foster the best talent at Schnackel.