

»Supplier Spotlight«



Six Questions With...

DAVID BURNLEY, SR.

PRESIDENT & CEO, DEVON INDUSTRIAL GROUP

After relocating from Cleveland, Ohio to The Motor City, David Burnley, Sr. knew he would have endless opportunities to break into the automotive industry. In partnership with one of the largest construction companies in the country, David formed Devon Industrial Group (DIG), which specializes in commercial construction services. DIG successfully manages, constructs and completes projects for clients across the Midwest, South and Canada, including Toyota, and is one of the leading contractors in today's marketplace.

Tell us about your company – how and why did Devon Industrial Group get started?

By working in the construction industry at such an early age, I quickly gained the experience I needed to become an entrepreneur. After successfully starting my first business, Devon Contracting, Inc., in 1992, a customer suggested that we expand and put together a LLC to help position minority businesses more strongly in the automotive industry. So in 1998, in partnership with our neighbor Walbridge, we formed Devon Industrial Group, one of the largest minority-owned contractors in the country.

How did your partnership begin with Toyota, and how has it since evolved?

I always like to say that through our relationship, we've become more than a supplier to Toyota. We've become their partner. Our connection began about 15 years ago after the National Minority Supplier Development Council and my regional organization, the Michigan Minority Supplier Development Council, helped us approach Toyota about opportunities to work together. After quite a bit of patience and persistence, we were given an excellent shot as a Tier II Supplier. That experience – which came with its own set challenges – gave us the time we needed to learn and develop into a stronger supplier. For example, I still remember an issue we had at one of our Kentucky locations. Working with Jehan Ghouse, now a Toyota Senior Manager, we learned it's not the magnitude of the issue that matters – whether big or small – but rather how quickly you resolve them. Applying the Toyota Way in all facets of our business, we were able to learn, grow and evolve into a Tier I.

You've collaborated with many other companies over the years. How have these relationships helped establish and/or grow your business?

The construction industry is notorious for being a high-risk, low margin trade. So, working with Walbridge on a number of projects – for over 25 years – has definitely

opened a lot of doors for our company. Through our partnership, we've been able to refine our processes and procedures, always striving for excellence in all that we do. We've also gained access to more unions, suppliers, and customers to cultivate sustainable relationships, along with capital, a well-known hurdle for minority-owned businesses.

Have you had any mentors in your life who have made an impact on your career paths?

In addition to Walbridge, whose support and insight from the very beginning has been extremely valuable, Toyota team members, like Adrienne Trimble, Jim Holloway, Jamie Todd, Sam Cracraft, and Jehan Gouse (who I mentioned before), have also all been instrumental factors in DIG's continuous growth. Through these relationships, I've developed a greater understanding and appreciation of the value of having guidance as a diverse business. As a result, we, too, are looking for ways to support and aid other suppliers in gaining experience in the industry.

Describe a time when you needed to 'reinvent the wheel' or think differently to put your company in a position to succeed.

When brainstorming how to continually improve our business operations, I like to routinely ask myself, "How can I add more value to my customers?" One way we've committed to thinking differently is working directly with our clients at the outset of each project to better streamline costs. Historically in our industry, the pre-bid phase has involved a drawn out process that leads to longer production time and higher expenses. As a result, we tweaked this line of thinking in our business, becoming more efficient at the start of development to complete projects in a more safe and timely manner.

Planning for the future is critical. Where do you see your company in 5-10 years?

Leaving a legacy for my family has always been my motivator to think long-term. As I look to retire within the next few years, I'm excited to have my daughter, Stephanie Burnley, take the reins and continue the success of Devon Industrial Group. Right now, we're working on a really aggressive succession plan, where she's gaining expertise in all facets of the business. Inspired by the success of third/fourth generation companies in our industry, we're driven every day to continue providing long-lasting exceptional service to our customers and partners.



Company Profile

CORE CAPABILITIES

Construction management, design build/preconstruction and general contracting for multiple markets

HEADQUARTERS

Detroit, Michigan

CERTIFICATION(S)

MBE; active with Michigan Minority Supplier Development Council

SUPPLIER RELATIONSHIP WITH TOYOTA

Tier I

TOYOTA