

Douglass Colony Group Selected Mountain States Specialty Contractor of the Year

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By Paula Moore

Specialty contractor Douglass Colony Group Inc. of Colorado has a penchant for tackling tough, often one-of-a-kind roofing jobs—from the historic Colorado State Capitol dome in downtown Denver to a health care company's skyscraper headquarters.

"We do the basic box buildings, but really our niche is difficult work that takes more thought and engineering," says Steve Bechtholdt, Douglass Colony executive vice president and head of its metals division. "We do a lot of fabrication. We have a craft mentality when it's demanded and when someone can pay for it."

The Capitol project's general contractor, GH Phipps Construction Cos., Greenwood Village, Colo., hired Douglass Colony to repair or replace corroded components on the dome. Phipps has a long track record of working with the roofing company and appreciates the firm's willingness to collaborate and innovate.

"They try to recommend better solutions and details, based on their experience and on their ability to fabricate what the architects are looking for," says Gary Constant, Phipps' vice president of business development and preconstruction services. "They're a resourceful company that's committed to getting the job done." Constant has worked with Douglass Colony over his entire 27-year construction career.

More Than a Roofer

Douglass Colony had its start in 1947 as the Earl F. Douglass Roofing Co., better known as Douglass Roofing, in Greeley, Colo. Earl Douglass previously was a partner in another company, now Central States Roofing Inc. of Colorado Springs and Denver, with his brother Eddie. Douglass Roofing formed Colony Metal Inc. in 1983 as a full-service architectural-metal systems business. The two companies operated as sister firms until early 2009, when the operations combined as the Douglass Colony Group. Today's company leaders include Robert "Bob" Bechtholdt, Steve's brother and Douglass Colony's president and CEO, and Patrick "Pat" Wolach, who oversees the roofing division.

Over the years, privately held Douglass Colony—now based in the north Denver municipality of Commerce City—has expanded its work from commercial roofing to include metal work, composite wall panels, solar applications, waterproofing and daylighting.

The company employs 400 people in four offices and reported 2013 revenue of \$55.6 million. While the company has worked in many states across the country, it operates mostly in Colorado and in Nebraska, Kansas, Arizona and New Mexico.

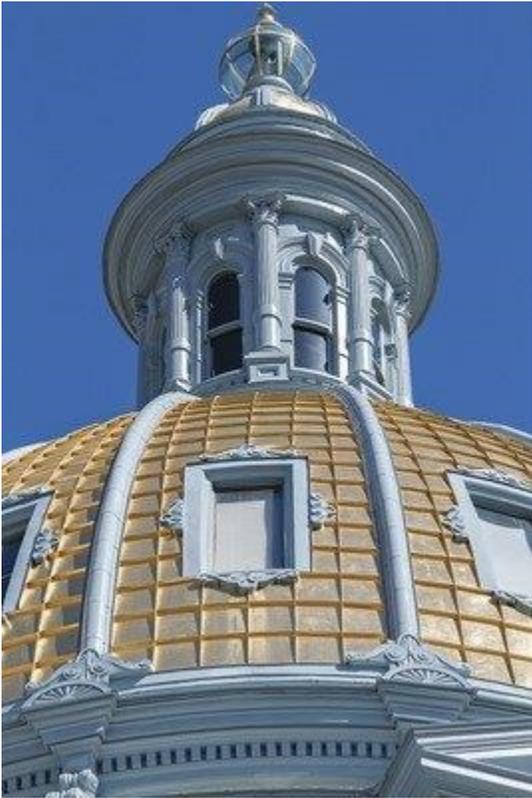
"We are busy," Steve Bechtholdt says. "We have a bigger backlog than we've ever had, and we're busy into next year."

The scope of Douglass Colony projects ranges from historic renovations to some of the world's most advanced technological and sustainable buildings at the Golden, Colo., campus of the National Renewable Energy Laboratory. The contractor worked on some of NREL's greenest structures—the Research Support Facility, which includes primary labs for research on renewable energy and energy efficiency, as well as the Energy Systems Integration Facility, home to one of the world's most powerful supercomputers and one of the few megawatt-scale energy-testing facilities in the U.S.

The contractor's work on the buildings ranged from installing passive solar wall units to designing, manufacturing and installing more than 8,000 Rheinzink wall tiles. Both projects earned LEED Platinum ratings and are among Colorado's first net-zero energy buildings.

"At least 50% of the buildings we work on are going for some LEED certification," Bechtholdt says.





Douglass Colony worked with general contractor JE Dunn Construction on the ESIF project, acting as a consultant early on and then installing roofing, balcony and water systems. "We brought Douglass Colony in to bounce ideas off during early programming. Everything you do at NREL, you have to do with a purpose," says Brady Mercer, a project manager for JE Dunn. "Douglass Colony put a lot of attention into quality."

Top-Down Green

The company has grown greener as well, making its sales staff LEED AP-certified to help customers get LEED ratings for projects or reduce their environmental footprint. Douglass Colony's headquarters office is LEED Silver rated and the first LEED-certified industrial building in Commerce City. The office's energy-saving aspects include sunscreens and a rooftop solar system.

Other premier projects include handling the horizontal waterproofing on decks, doing sheet metal flashing and installing PVC-membrane roofing at the 14-story, LEED Gold corporate headquarters of DaVita Healthcare Partners Inc. in downtown Denver. DaVita is one of this country's largest kidney-care providers.

Douglass Colony's other health care jobs include installing stainless steel metal and aluminum screen panels at The Children's Hospital Colorado and putting on a roof at Castle Rock Adventist Hospital.

Douglass Colony regularly lands jobs at Denver International Airport, one of the world's busiest, and is currently working on the long-awaited DIA Westin terminal hotel as well as hangars for United and Frontier airlines. "We did the vast majority of work on the original airport roofs, though not the Teflon ones," says Bechtholdt. "We've also replaced lots of roofs because of hail damage and wear." The airport's Teflon roofs include the signature white, Teflon-coated fiberglass roof over the main

terminal that resembles mountain peaks.

The firm's business strategy now includes ensuring that Douglass Colony offers the competitive pay and benefits necessary to attract skilled workers.

The company is also focused on technology in order to satisfy owners' demands for precision work, but also to help ease labor demands. Douglass Colony went paperless years ago. All of its foremen use smartphones with apps for time management and documentation. All project superintendents carry iPads. The company assigns project managers with extensive experience to oversee all jobs to further ensure quality.

"People used to look at construction and think if you knew hammer and nails, that was enough," Bechtholdt says. "Now everything is so technically precise; standards are much higher. The future is for those contractors who think outside the box."

The Project of a Lifetime

Douglass Colony calls the work it did on the \$17-million restoration of the 120-year-old Colorado State Capitol dome the "project of a lifetime."

"Douglass Colony was brought onto the project as the most resourceful local company and the most responsible," says Gary Constant, vice president with project general contractor GH Phipps.

The roofing contractor's crews worked for three years 250 ft above the ground to fix or replace components—from copper panels under gold leaf and copper trim to ornamental metal pieces—in preparation for the dome's regilding, which was done to commemorate the state's mining history.

Douglass Colony workers were perched on a plastic-skinned scaffold that sometimes swayed so badly in high winds that they had to leave it temporarily. They also worked during heavy winter snows. Although the dome had been regilded in the past, it had never before been renovated completely. Each of the hundreds of pieces that Douglass Colony removed had to be replaced in exactly the same position.

Pieces that were so deteriorated they couldn't be restored had to be recreated, and for that Douglass Colony brought in Hungarian-born historic roofing craftsman Erno Ovari, who lives in Utah. He trained the workers in old-world roofing techniques and acted as the contractor's design consultant.

"Some of the restoration was really severe, requiring making some pieces," says Douglass Colony's Steve Bechtholdt. "Erno worked hand in hand with us on the job."

The dome reopened to the public in October.