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# *Providing* **STREAMLINED & EFFICIENT HVAC SYSTEMS**



 **Gerry Wiegmann, P.E.**  
Chief Executive Officer of Wiegmann Associates



 **Chad Wiegmann, P.E.**  
President of Wiegmann Associates



 **Grant Wiegmann**  
Director of Business Development & Preconstruction of Wiegmann Associates

**Written by Allison Dempsey**

**W**ith its impressive 25-year proven track record of excellence in mechanical contracting, St. Louis, Missouri-based Wiegmann Associates continues to focus on groundbreaking, energy-saving and cost-effective HVAC solutions, celebrating a tenure as one of the industry's top national design/build mechanical contractors. Embracing knowledge and experience in value engineering and HVAC design/build, Wiegmann's numerous projects span 42 states and have saved millions of dollars for clients in both upfront HVAC cost and energy consumption, combining leading-edge technology with effective design to reduce operating costs. ►►



“One of our company’s focuses is doing more work directly for owners, showing them the value of our company,” says Grant Wiegmann, Director of Business Development and Preconstruction. “The highest value we offer is providing simple but efficient HVAC systems at an economical cost. We feel that’s what owners typically want, but often say it’s hard to get because of the traditional way construction planning goes.”



St Charles Emergency Operations Center

Often, when consultants are hired to design an HVAC system, it’s more difficult for them to pinpoint the most economical solution. They don’t have their own field laborers, aren’t installing equipment, controls, duct or piping, so it’s harder for them to know what constitutes cost, says Grant. Wiegmann has its own controls team and field laborers on staff, along with in-house engineering expertise. The company is unique in that it gives owners efficient systems that are not only simple to operate and money-saving in the long-term, but are also competitive from a first-cost standpoint.

***“We don’t micromanage. We give people freedom and we hire people with a lot of drive.”***



“A lot of times we see the intent is there by an owner who has hired a consultant to design a system that’s efficient, but the job goes over budget because those designs were too complex. Our engineers know how to design a project cost effectively,” he says.



Naval Air Station Whidbey Island, Oak Island, Washington

“In some cases, consultants add too much safety factor on top of their cooling loads. The result is that too much tonnage is added to the system, which makes the system consume more energy without providing the comfort it should,” says founder Gerry Wiegmann. “Over the last 25 years, buildings have become better insulated, more tightly constructed, and glass thermal values have improved greatly. Ten years ago if a building owner went out and bought glass, it had a 0.5 shading coefficient and a 0.5 U-value. Today, even the inexpensive glass is 30 to 40 percent better than that.”



Indeed, many elements of design and construction have vastly improved over the years, coupled with the fact that computers and laptops today put out minimal heat, while LED lights are also extremely efficient – about a third of the power draw compared to 20 to 25 years ago.

“We travel a lot with owners and we monitor buildings where we’ve installed new systems and, in a lot of cases, even we’re surprised at how light the load is,” he says. “We put a system in a one million square-foot building near Las Vegas and watched the building operate and it never needed more than 700 tons



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of cooling. The anticipated cooling load never materialized because of a combination of better lights, a white roof, and motion sensors on the lights.”

When all of that is taken into consideration, the cooling loads calculated on paper often never really occur, he says. So the advantage to doing work nationwide and doing repeat work for owners lies in the team educating themselves by watching the very systems they install. The Wiegmann team learns first-hand how well these systems work, and uses those cost-effective means and concepts repeatedly in future projects.

Efficient ductwork design is another one of Wiegmann’s advantages. “The difference between other design/build contractors and us, is that we can take a traditional duct system design for a classroom or office, redraw it by taking a few fittings out to streamline it, and still deliver the same air at the same noise level – but save 40 percent of the cost,” says Gerry. “That’s a pretty significant savings for something that delivers the exact same value.”

He says it’s a good opportunity when contractors, who have honed their skills on the most cost-effective way to build a product, get to use that expertise. “That’s the reason we travel,” says Gerry. “We learn from our local work every day,

watching how the systems perform. Over the years we have completed over 500 million dollars’ worth of work outside of the St. Louis area.”

Wiegmann recently completed HVAC work on the 16-story, 675-bed RISE on Chauncey student housing property near Purdue University in West Lafayette, Indiana, serving as the Engineer of Record and design/build HVAC mechanical contractor for the project. “A big portion of our business now is doing student living and multi-family, high-rise projects,” says Grant.

The company has also designed HVAC systems for a chain of nearly 70 outpatient surgery centers, embracing and overcoming unique challenges and requirements, including the fact that many of the buildings used were not originally intended as medical facilities. Wiegmann has also replaced outdated chillers with energy-efficient systems that meet strict temperature control, humidity and equipment placement requirements for specialized MRI facilities across St. Louis.

“We learned how to make doctors and staff working in these surgery centers more comfortable while still providing a low-cost system,” says Gerry. “The doctor is gowned up, with gloves and a cap on and bright lights shining down, and the doctor wants it 60 degrees and he wants it dry. We’ve learned ▶



Soldiers Memorial Military Museum  
Photo Credit: Courtesy of the Missouri Historical Society



National Archives and Record Administration - St. Louis



► how to provide that environment with a low-cost package piece of equipment.”

These surgery centers now use the company as a trusted HVAC partner to complete a large portion of its facilities: They find an existing building and Wiegmann makes the trip to the site, surveys it, and puts the design together.

Wiegmann truly manages to apply all the knowledge it’s learned over the years to each project to give the best value possible to the owner, says Gerry. “What we want out of that is repeat work. We want them to be thrilled with the product they got – and to come back to us for their next project.”

Other notable projects for Wiegmann include the Soldiers Memorial Military Museum in St. Louis, renovating a museum-quality HVAC system as part of the Missouri Historical Society’s \$30 million historic revitalization. Here, Wiegmann provided design/assist services to reduce equipment costs and develop an energy-efficient system. The HVAC system was designed to maintain strict humidity levels to preserve artifacts in the galleries while maintaining comfort for visitors. Another project, LEED-certified The Chefs’ Warehouse in Las Vegas, encompasses office space, a fully functional test kitchen, a -10°F freezer, cooler, candy/chocolate cooler space, dry storage and cold dock, all with unique temperature and HVAC requirements. Finally, the National Archives and Record Administration St. Louis project required Wiegmann to value engineer the mechanical systems to reduce the cost of the mechanical systems to help the project move forward.

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While Wiegmann’s average project size used to be between \$500,000 and \$2 million, the company is now doing a lot of projects in the \$4 to \$8 million range. “But no matter what the project size is, we put the same emphasis on delivering a great product,” says Gerry. “We feel confident in our ability to grow by doing repeat work and focusing on larger work for the same customers.”

Grant adds that establishing trust with clients is of the utmost importance when building and growing the company base, ensuring projects continue to materialize down the road. “Sometimes it takes a few projects to establish relationships because people aren’t just going to trust you blindly right

away," he says. "Our goal is to get to the point where we can do open book with the customer. We don't have to compete against 10 contractors on every job; the customer comes to us and they know they're going to get a fair cost."

That open and honest communication applies to both customers and employees, Gerry says: "We have high expectations for our employees balanced with a focus on open communication. We don't micromanage. We give people freedom and we hire people with a lot of drive. That approach is successful for us and we feel we offer highly motivated professionals a lot. If you're free to create your own success, it puts you in a great spot."

Wiegmann's staff comprises a mix of ages and education levels that add to the company's overall capabilities. "We try to hire all engineers out of school, even if they're not going to be a traditional design engineer, such as estimators or project managers, because we feel like they have the right mindset and tools they got from school," Grant says. "It's obviously good to have experience too, and we also have a lot of people who have been here many years, because we have a pretty low turnover rate."

Working to keep clients on long-term is also vital for success, says Gerry. "If we grow then they can grow with us," he says. "It's important to us that our customers see our expertise is going to help them grow."

Wiegmann strives to add several new customers every year, while maintaining repeat customers for service work in St. Louis.

"Customers know there are a lot of mechanical contractors, so they have to be happy with the product and the service they get to keep their systems running," he explains. "We lose very few customers that we service. We design and install our own direct digital control systems that monitor everything that goes on with the HVAC system, and that makes us a much better contractor."

He stresses that the company is continually learning, and strives to be a single source of responsibility. When Wiegmann installs a system, the team watches to ensure it works. When work is done nationally, the company can do a lot of diagnosis remotely, providing clients with confidence. Occasionally Wiegmann still needs to send techs out, but they can tell a lot remotely on the systems installed.

"We want customers to trust us. People that we work with call us with new opportunities," says Gerry. "That's the most fun work there is." ■

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