

CEBA

BUILT BY THE BEST **CASE STUDY**

By Keith Loria

Sharing the Chill

Primus Builders delivers first spec cold storage warehouse in Dallas.

Cold Summit Development, a developer of cold storage facilities, strives to provide its tenants with maximum options from freezer temperatures to office space.

To capitalize on the white-hot cold storage market in Dallas, Texas, United States, Cold Summit Development selected Primus Builders to provide design-build services on a 344,000-square-foot greenfield cold storage facility.

“This project is one of the first speculative cold storage warehouses ever on the market,” says Erik Gunderson, a founding partner and Executive Vice President at Primus Builders. “That means instead of the owner being the end user, this facility would be shared by four tenants. Fortunately, Cold Summit Development is an expert in cold storage construction and issued a robust, comprehensive RFP package that included features appealing to tenants. For example, flexible freezer temperatures that allow tenants to pivot their inventories to consumer needs as well as customizable offices.”

Included in the project are convertible freezers (-20° to 55°), truck docks, office space and maintenance areas. As the facility is a multi-tenant complex with four individual tenant areas, each needed to be independent from the others. Tenant one would operate in two suites and the remaining three tenants would have a single suite each.

From the outset, Primus Builders recognized the competition would be challenging



Primus Builders designed and built a 344,000-square-foot greenfield cold storage facility and one of the first speculative cold storage warehouses in the Dallas, Texas, market. (Photo courtesy of Primus Builders.)

and focused on bringing the best subcontractor talent to the project.

“We knew Cold Summit was concerned with more than just the bottom line ... and while this is hugely important for commercial success, Cold Summit truly values partnership and took that approach to a level this industry rarely sees,” Gunderson says. “We also looked at more operationally efficient solutions and offered these as value-added propositions that helped set Primus apart. Our willingness to listen was a huge factor in our ability to secure the work.”

Getting Started

Many years ago, the Associated General Contractors developed a concept referred to as “partnering.” This concept has been used throughout the industry and emphasizes the importance of bringing together all project stakeholders.

“Cold Summit Development is a true reflection of this partnering concept,” Gunderson says. “Their company mission statement is to ‘Love. Listen. Communicate.’ From the initial kick-off meeting, during monthly meetings,

and all the way to the close-out and post-occupancy work for tenants, this philosophy was widespread on the project, both in the field and in the office.”

The project kicked off in December 2020 and was completed in January 2022. Keeping to that timeline was something that Primus made an important focus.

“The Dallas landscape certainly has challenges,” Gunderson says. “Hot and cold weather extremes hit this job, as did an unseasonably wet winter and a dangerous ice storm. Through close coordination and deploying the Last Planner System in the field, Primus could make daily adjustments, helping all trade partners finish on time.”

The Dallas-Fort Worth (DFW) area is a key logistics hub with 40% of the U.S. population within 24 hours and more than 90% within 48 hours. The project is prime for businesses serving DFW directly, as it is 12 miles from downtown Dallas. It is also attractive to those focused on the broader regional/national market for its access to transportation and logistics infrastructure.

Innovative Design

For Primus, Cold Summit Development represented a newer type of client in the cold storage industry – the real estate developer.

“Since they are not building operators, they are in the position of trying to predict the needs of their future tenants,” Gunderson says. “It led to a number of innovative designs for the Dallas project.”

That included a roof-top packaged refrigeration machine room.

“This is the first Primus project to feature a packaged refrigeration machine room installed on the lower roof,” Gunderson says. “This unique design feature serves multiple tenants from one central unit. Utility bills are separated based on refrigeration flows to individual tenants. The lower roof location means fewer maintenance requirements on the higher roof. This, coupled with full stair towers from the outside of the building to the condensing platform and refrigeration areas, makes for a safer building.”

Primus also installed the infrastructure for a building management system to allow future tenants to electronically manage systems such as lights, water and dock equipment, etc. This allows individual tenants to monitor utility and equipment usage to keep their spaces running at optimal efficiency.



The project included a roof-top packaged refrigeration machine room, installed on the lower roof, which serves multiple tenants from one central unit but with separate utility bills. (Photo courtesy of Primus Builders.)

“Perhaps the most interesting was the use of a low charge, fully convertible NH3 refrigeration system,” Gunderson says. “It provided refrigerant charges below regulatory thresholds that performed at the highest of standards and consumed less energy. Also, the packaged refrigeration machine room installed on the lower roof is a unique design feature that serves multiple tenants from one central unit. Utility bills are separated based on refrigeration flows to individual tenants.”

Additionally, Primus provided flexible floorplans to allow future tenants to subdivide freezer space. At the Dallas project, for example, one tenant wanted half of its freezer to be -20° and the other half to be -5°. Working around existing operations, Primus modified the space to accommodate this request.

Sewer Lines

Future tenants are not limited to only cold storage customers. Primus installed additional sewer lines to allow Cold Summit to potentially attract food processors as well.

“As Primus continues to provide these tenant-specific updates, our team finds ways to deliver faster,” Gunderson says. “The first tenant update Primus completed took 10 weeks; the second took just five weeks.”

Sustainability Measures

Cold Summit incorporated into the project energy efficient cooling and lighting systems that offer energy savings. However, because the Dallas facility is geared toward tenant

needs, Cold Summit did not incorporate substantial sustainable components in order to remain flexible.

“If a future tenant has sustainability goals, Primus will enlist the assistance of our in-house sustainability project manager to provide a plan to ensure those goals are achieved,” Gunderson says.

Overcoming Issues

One of the most unusual challenges of the project was that the site spanned two municipalities – the City of Lancaster and the City of Dallas.

“Dallas was the primary permitter, but Lancaster had certain aesthetic standards we had to abide by that were often conflicting,” Gunderson said. “For example, the fencing selected by Cold Summit was allowed in Dallas, but not in Lancaster. So, in addition to obtaining permits in two municipalities, we had to modify the fence selection and other building components to meet the requirements of both municipalities.”

The other interesting challenge was the weather. In February 2021, Texas experienced the biggest ice storm in its history.

“We were forced to shut the project down while the region recovered,” Gunderson said. “This event also made it difficult to receive building materials. We relied on the strong relationships we have with our trade partners and using the Last Planner System to re-work the schedule and make sure we could complete the project on time.”

A Job Well Done

As this project was one of the first speculative cold storage facilities in the cold storage market, flexibility, operational efficiency and robust building support systems and protection measures were deployed to help differentiate this build.

“We’ve been extremely proud of the continuous improvement we’ve demonstrated when customizing for building tenants,” Gunderson says. “This is a new concept for our team, and we keep getting better at it.”

Cold Summit was very pleased with the project. The company’s Vice President of Construction, Brad Blocker, says, “Cold Summit’s company motto is ‘Love. Listen. Communicate.’ Primus lived up to this sentiment. We look forward to future projects together.”

KEITH LORIA is an award-winning journalist who has been writing for major newspapers and magazines for close to 20 years, on topics as diverse as sports, business and technology.

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When the project shut down during the biggest ice storm in Texas history, Primus relied on its strong relationships with trade partners to complete the project on time. (Photo courtesy of Primus Builders.)



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