

Welcome to the Shelter Structures Newsletter: Issue #5

Celebrating 10 Years : A chat with Shelter Structures President, Patricia Smail.

January marked the 10th Anniversary of Shelter Structures, Inc. What are some of the toughest challenges the company faced over the past ten years?

The economic downturn over the last few years has been difficult, but we are fortunate to have a product that is useful in both good times and bad. When the economy is booming, we can help expansion plans with a building that can be operational in 8 weeks. When the economy is in a downturn, we provide a cost effective alternative to brick and mortar.



Tensioned fabric buildings have many uses across a variety of industries. What are some of the strangest building requests you accommodated over the years?

We have a customer who needs a shelter to cover a row of tanks, remediate them, then move on to the next row. They need a building that not only can move forward, but turn sideways as well. We designed an 18,000 sf building 80' tall that will be mounted on a traction system that is typically used to move large buildings. The shelter will go up one row and down the next. Pretty unique.

What are some of the worst weather conditions you had to deal with?

Sandstorms in North Africa. We had a customer lose half of a shelter to blowing sands. They unloaded the shelter components, laid it out, suffered a terrific storm, then couldn't find all of the parts when they were ready to install it. I don't think they ever did. We have designed shelters for the Army in Alaska that have to withstand 70# snow loads, and regularly design shelters in Florida that need to meet a 140mph wind load requirement.

Your buildings are very durable, what are some of the longest-standing structures you have built?

I had a customer call in December looking for his first replacement cover since he purchased the shelter – in 1992! That's 20 years, and the fabrics we use now are much better than those available 20 years ago. These buildings will outlast all of us!

How does Shelter Structures respond to increasing regulatory requirements like compliance with building codes and building permit requirements?

We use an engineering firm which has done more of these types of buildings than anyone else. They are licensed in 48 states, and can provide engineered drawings for any shelter in any location. We comply with all local codes and meet design requirements for traditional buildings.

What are some of the most fun projects Shelter Structures was involved in?

We have done some backlot work at Disney, designed a building for the space shuttle Endeavor in California, and designed a very large, track mounted shelter providing access to a 42,000 sf. work area.

It must be rewarding working with the DOD - what are some of the larger projects Shelter Structures completed for the government? How do these buildings help the military?

It truly is rewarding. Our niche within the DOD is efficient aircraft canopy design. If we are able to get 2 or 3 aircraft into one large shelter, rather than have one shelter for each aircraft, we not only save the customer money, but precious ramp space as well. Last year we completed a project covering 54 aircraft with 18 hangars. This year, we are working on a project to cover 113 aircraft with 50 hangars. It's challenging, but humbling to know you are helping our service men and women in some small way. Aircraft hangars reduce the cockpit temperature by up to 80 degrees, and protect the increasingly expensive electronics, so they are very cost efficient.

Were the buildings always environmentally friendly, or did the newer "hybrid" buildings develop from a specific consumer need?

Our innovative designs are always driven by customer needs. Our first "hybrid" building was designed for the UN to serve as the main Post Office in Port au Prince Haiti after the earthquake of January 2010. They knew there would be counters along the walls, with people leaning against them, and security issues as well, so they asked if we could reinforce the first 8 feet. Once we did that, we had more requests for our "hardsides", as we call them. The DOD likes them for warehouses. Very practical for hard use low to the ground

Where do you see Shelter Structures in the next 10 years?

Still leading the way with innovation and customization. We are constantly looking for new materials to make a better product, and believe that this industry has a long way to grow in the United States. We are also working on some new designs that will allow our customers more flexibility in relocating their shelters. We look forward to growing, and expanding our position as the most creative, customer centric producer in the field.

Are your products green?

The steel we use in our shelters is recycled. The translucent fabric allows natural light, reducing energy costs. And all shelters can be removed and reused elsewhere, leaving no footprint at the original site. We feel these benefits offer a decided advantage over traditional brick and mortar.