

Taking a tip from Europe to repair concrete

By Gerald Frawley
staff writer

Americans have long had a reputation as a throwaway society. Bottles, foam cups, plastic bags — buildings, imagine, discarded because they're old and it's easy to go and build a new one in a cornfield somewhere.

In Europe, where all of the cornfields are needed to plant corn, people have been forced by cost and lack of land to keep what they have longer.

Innovative ways to refurbish, insulate and repair exteriors; new techniques in structural reinforcement; and innovative concrete repairs — all of these things have been practiced in Europe for years, but have only come to this country within

the last decade or so.

Take concrete repair. Corrective Systems Michigan Inc. of Birmingham uses a high pressure injection system to repair cracked and leaking concrete.

The company entered the market less than a year ago with its advanced German technology and competes against more-established concrete patch and epoxy injection companies.

Vice president Dennis Flynn said concrete repair techniques in this country haven't changed in decades. Typically, a contractor applies a sealant or cement bond to the interior or digs around the foundation and applies it to the wall's exterior or builds a drainage system.

"There's really no logical reason to let someone in your basement to patch a crack," Flynn said. When ap-

plied to the interior, the bond or sealant stops the water leakage on the inside of the wall, but the crack and leaking water are still in the wall. Many times, the leak is stopped only temporarily.

EXCAVATING AROUND the leak and patching it from the outside is a better option, Flynn said, but it is an extremely expensive one — often times ranging into the thousands.

Epoxy injection systems are better still, but the epoxy patch dries hard which doesn't help if the wall continues to move.

The high-pressure system developed in Germany and used by Corrective Systems Michigan was invented in Europe where buildings are hundreds of years old and repair is considered preferable to replacement.

The high pressure injection sys-

tems method is fairly simple — holes are drilled around the cracks and a bonding agent is injected into the wall to fill the cracks and gaps.

"Water leaks are really not under high pressure — it just seeps everywhere," he said. High pressure injected repairs accomplish two things: It bonds and plugs the cracks as well as forcing the water out.

When injected, the bonding agent is a fine liquid and able to penetrate cracks wherever water permeates. The bonding agent cures over time — the cure time is controlled by the chemical mix of the bonding agent — until it achieves a rubber-like consistency that fills and joins the concrete.

Because of the nature of high-pressure injection, it will not repair cracks in cement block basements and foundations.

RONALD ROY, district manager for Bertak Cos. — a national developer and property manager with holdings in southeast Michigan, said he was impressed enough with the idea to hire Corrective Systems to do some work at Mulwood Apartments and Terraces in Farmington Hills.

As a property manager, Bertak has had more than its share of concrete foundation leaks. "And nothing ever works."

The problem with concrete leaks is they often recur after they are repaired, he said. "Every time we've had a problem in the past, I couldn't find anyone to do a job."

Roy said he saw an article discussing the process and thought it might solve his problem. "I can't honestly say it has been long enough to see if it works, but I'm generally pleased with the company's response and the

process."

His other options — like repairing it from the inside, the outside, or improving irrigation around the foundation, are expensive. "If nothing else, it's costly from a project management standpoint."

Roy explained that whenever a traditional methods repair is made, the property manager must move the tenants to another apartment until they are completed. "Then, we don't want to have to move them again if there's a problem."

In addition to seeing the high-pressure process is also attractive because it isn't disruptive — the work takes hours instead of days — and the company stands behind the new process.

"In my experience, if a product holds up for two years, it will hold up from here to eternity," Bertak said.

Residential building toddlers

AP — Construction spending dropped 0.9 percent in May, reversing direction following the largest increase in more than a year just a month earlier, the government said.

Analysts were encouraged by an increase in residential construction and relatively stable government spending despite fiscal problems. But they saw no indication of any improvement in private non-residential construction.

Construction of new houses and apartments increased in all regions of the country except the West last month, advancing 5.2 percent to the highest level in seven months.

Still, analysts said the housing revival would be one of the weakest since World War II.

The Commerce Department said housing starts were at a seasonally adjusted annual rate of 1.04 million in June, up from a revised 989,000 in May. The May rate had been estimated at 981,000.

"It's still an anemic housing recovery," said economist David F. Seiders of the National Association of Home Builders. He is forecasting a total of 1.05 million housing starts this year, which would be the lowest since 1.015 million in 1946 and down from 1.19 million last year.

through January 1990.

It also was the first time it topped 1 million since November, when the rate was 1.13 million.

But the number of starts in the first six months of the year was 25 percent below that of the same period in 1990.

Applications for building permits, a barometer of future activity, rose 3.7 percent in June to an annual rate of 1.0 million. They have risen each month since January, the longest string since the 11-month period from August 1982 to July 1983 as the economy was emerging from the last recession.

Still, the June rate was well below the 1.34 million applications in 1989, the year before this recession began.

Both Seiders and David Berson, an economist with the Federal National Mortgage Association, said the so-called credit crunch continues to inhibit construction activity.

Single-family starts posted their third straight advance, up 3.8 percent to an 868,000 annual rate. Berson said growth in this sector would be more modest than that following previous recessions.

"Because this was a relatively mild recession, there's much less pent-up demand for housing," he said.

Berson also said the multi-family sector will remain weak. "Primarily because of the overbuilding in the early- and mid-1980s. Vacancy rates are still very high and, as a result, in many parts of the country it's simply uneconomical to build multi-family units."

Multi-family starts did rise 12.4 percent to a 172,000 annual rate. But Berson said the advance merely brought starts back to the April level after a 13.1 percent plunge in May. Overall, starts plummeted 14.8 percent to a 248,000 rate in the West,

the lowest level in three months and nearly wiping out a 15.0 percent gain the previous month.

Construction activity continued to improve in both the Midwest and South, which escaped the brunt of the recession.

Starts shot up 17.5 percent in the Midwest to a 255,000 rate, wiping out a 8.1 percent loss in May. Starts rose 6.0 percent in the South to 389,000, nearly erasing a 7.1 percent decline the previous month.

The Commerce Department said overall spending on residential, non-residential and government projects totaled a seasonally adjusted annual rate of \$403.1 billion, down from \$406.6 billion in April.

The revised 1.2 percent April gain was even stronger than the 0.8 percent increase first reported. It also was the largest since a 1.9 percent jump in February 1990.

The construction industry has been in a slump for more than a year, and the improvement in April was just the second in 12 months. Spending in May was 10.8 percent below that of May 1990.

Still, analysts contend the recession in the residential sector of the construction industry touched bottom last January. Home sales have improved since then, stimulating new housing construction.



Bruce Heckman



Robert Kayes



Cindy Clura

Taubman adds officers

Two corporate officers have been elected at the Taubman Co., Bloomfield Hills.

Bruce W. Heckman of Troy has been named group vice president for development, reporting to William S. Taubman, group senior vice president for development. Before joining the company in 1986, Heckman, a certified city planner, was executive vice president of the Chicago-based Teika Associates.

Robert B. Kayes of Rochester Hills has been elected group vice president for lease administration. He reports to J. Peter Scherer, group executive vice president. Before joining Taubman in 1986, Kayes was an attorney with the Yurika Foods

Corp., the U.S. Department of Labor and in private practice.

Cindy Clura of Farmington Hills has been named corporate marketing director for Forbes/Cohen Properties, Southfield. She will be responsible for marketing strategies and sales promotional programs of all Forbes/Cohen shopping centers.

She joins Forbes/Cohen from Northland Center/Westland Center

where she had been marketing director since 1986.

Funk & Co. Builders of West Bloomfield has announced plans for a \$120 million housing development called Fenton Farms. The development includes housing, a Tom Fazio golf course and an indoor/outdoor sports village.

Architect and site planner is Alexander Bogarts of Bloomfield Hills.

THOMAS HOLLOWAY, an economist with the Mortgage Bankers Association, predicted that the recovery, while gradual, will be erratic. "There'll be a lot of choppiness," he said.

Analysts contend the housing recession hit bottom with an 847,000 annual starts rate in January. New construction surged in February, but fell again the next month.

The June increase was the third straight gain and marked the longest string of advances since a four-month stretch from October 1989

Where there's a need, there's a way. The United Way.

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