

[Close-Up: Kirt Gilliland](#)**Irving Hughes management team keeps projects on deadline, budget**

By SAM HODGSON

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In 1995, after spending more than 30 years in San Diego watching construction projects fall behind schedule time after time, Kirt Gilliland came to Craig Irving and Jason Hughes with an idea.

"I approached them and said, hey, too many of your clients' projects that I'm working on aren't set up to be successful, and as a general contractor now I'm having to deal with that," Gilliland said. "So, why don't I join you and create Irving Hughes (construction management) and help you negotiate tenant improvement dollars and construction schedules into the lease so that we can be successful when the deal is signed and not try to play damage control afterwards."

The concept stuck.



Fast-forward 12 years. Gilliland is still with **Irving Hughes**, heading up the construction-management department. Since its inception, he's overseen more than \$150 million in projects, helping smaller companies bring their concepts to fruition.

Gilliland's long service in the construction industry meant he knew what made a project succeed and fail. With that in mind, he now attempts to steer companies in the right direction from the moment they begin preparing a project. In his 30 years in San Diego, he had seen too many projects fail because of poor planning, and was dedicated to making sure no project he ever worked on would fail.

"As a contractor, once I got involved in a job, if it was going to fail, it was already set up to be a failure because their wasn't somebody like me who had managed the expectations of a client," Gilliland said during a recent interview. "So the plans had been drawn and they were already over budget or they were already behind schedule, and I had six weeks to complete a 12-week project."

To avoid scenarios with its clients, Irving Hughes attempts to make all aspects of the project clear from the get-go. At the onset, Gilliland and Vice President of Project Management Dean Petersen sit down with the client and work out the project schedule, its budget and which consultants will best suit the development.

Because the business caters to smaller companies that do not have construction expertise, Gilliland often finds himself doing a bit of handholding and supervising for his clients along the way.

"Most companies, they know what they do -- they build widgets or they're a service provider or whatever," he said. "They don't understand the design and construction process."

"And it's become a very complicated and fast-paced process. So we provide the expertise to help them come on and assemble a team of appropriate and experienced consultants."

The strategy has worked well in San Diego.

Between Gilliland and Petersen, the department has overseen nearly 5 million square feet of construction, valued at about \$225 million.

Notable projects include the \$9.4 million, 165,000-square-foot AMN Healthcare Corporate Center, the \$9.6 million 135,000-square-foot Cooley Goodward LLP Sunroad Corporate Center and the \$10 million, 198,000-square foot Qtron Legacy Stowe Business Center.

The company is currently working on a project for Point Loma Nazarene University, among other developments.

Because Gilliland has learned from experience how a project can go awry, he now makes sure the projects he manages finish on deadline and on budget -- a goal he said is met with every client.

He said the company's biggest challenge is letting people know that they are available to help.

"We have to continue to let people know that our services are available to help them," he said. "A lot of people that are embarking on the design and construction process aren't aware of our services, so they try to do it themselves. It's kind of like people trying to do their taxes themselves without using a CPA or an accountant, because they're just not aware that the service is out there."