

If You Build It, They Will Come

The method, muscle and mindset behind the nation's first arena conversion

by Lorrie Foreman
Sr. Vice President
Irvine Team

Representing the first-of-its-kind transformation, the renovation of Houston's Lakewood Church received worldwide attention. But just how did this jock-to-flock public assembly transformation take place? Enter Lorrie Foreman — clearly one of the most influential women in the construction industry and unquestionably the intellectual powerhouse behind the Lakewood action plan — who offers her person perspective of this history-making project.



Converting Houston's Compaq Center into the new home for Lakewood Church took a lot of things: a proven method for managing 50 contractors and consultants and a \$95 million budget, 1.4 million man hours of muscle on the 15-month job site and a strategic design + construction mindset. After all, never before has a sports arena been

transformed into a house of worship, particularly one worthy of a 16,000-seat mega church for the nation's fastest-growing non-denominational congregation.

Backed by the business savvy of Irvine Team, I stepped onto the project site with 20 years of experience in managing the design and construction of technically sophisticated and generally unique buildings, a degree in civil engineering and life skills earned early in my career as an advisor to the Chief of Naval Operations' Pentagon staff.

Certainly Lakewood's transformation was not a fluke of perfection, rather the outcome of a meticulously managed process that continued to grow as our project team, which I headed, consistently identified cost-saving opportunities that not only protected the integrity of

renovation and construction, but also allowed for tremendous enhancements elsewhere.

The architects, construction supervisors and co-workers on the Lakewood project respected Irvine Team leadership, and we continuously strived to make "it" look easy — whether "it" encompassed forming and managing 50 expert third-party contractors and consultants, including a pair of stage and lighting specialists who have 11 Emmy awards between them, or addressing the acoustical complexities of adding waterfalls on Pastor Osteen's stage where celebrities from Mick Jagger to Madonna to Mickey Mouse once performed.

Balancing leadership with a sense of humor and "servant leadership tools" is an approach that consistently benefits projects, and the Lakewood Church project was no exception. "Can you educate me?" is a question I asked frequently, and it is a tactic I've embraced throughout my 20-plus-year career.

Like Oprah, I recognize that life has its "ah ha" moments. Reflecting back on the Lakewood project, there was precisely such a moment when, after several months of daily around-the-clock dedication, the project team collectively realized the magnitude of the renovation.

To grasp the enormity of the Lakewood project, consider that Irvine's team of experts laid enough carpet to cover more than nine football fields, the total amount of low-voltage cable used would stretch to the outskirts of Huntsville, Texas, some 57 miles away, and the total paint used would fill several Olympic-size swimming pools.

The numbers behind the project are staggering:

- Total budget: \$95 million
- Total man hours expended on the project: Approximately 1.4 million
- Total number of contractors and consultants hired by Irvine Team: 50
- Emmy award winners brought in as consultants: 2
- Total capacity: 16,000
- Length of total low voltage cable used: 57 miles
- Amount of air cooled in completed building: Over 1 million cubic feet per minute
- Total carpet laid in the facility: About 50,000 square yards
- New and existing light fixtures in the complex: 7,000
- Number of doors in the new facility: 1,000
- Number of new toilets that have been installed in the new facility: 296
- Total number of waterfalls in the interior of the building: 2

With Lakewood Church now opening its doors to an estimated 30,000 worshippers each week, our entire project team feels an understandable pride about transforming a project site of ‘workshop’ into an amazing house of worship...

... proving that if you build it, they *will* come.

THOUGHTS FROM IRVINE TEAM’S CEO

Lorrie Foreman is one-of-a-kind, encompassing people skills, business know how and technical expertise that positioned her as the industry’s best person to spearhead the Lakewood project. Her unique approach to overcoming daily obstacles, an approachable confidence as the authority figure and a timely ability to shape people’s perspectives as three keys to Lorrie’s professional success and the Lakewood project’s on time, under-budget completion in July 2005.

Dennis Irvine
Founder, President & CEO
Irvine Team

Lorrie D. Foreman has more than 20 years of experience in managing the architectural design and commercial construction of technically sophisticated, unique buildings and is widely recognized as one of the most influential women in the construction industry. From the architectural challenges and the acoustical demands of a state-of-the-art theater, to the complete build-out of the world's largest complex for aircraft testing, Ms. Foreman has developed successful strategies for delivering difficult projects in time frames that met the clients' pressing needs.