

Mountain States Fence – Salt Lake City

Fencing Contractor Has Forged
a Strong Niche in Market

Mountain States Fence has provided more than 133,000 ft of chain link on Bangerter Highway in Salt Lake, and 199,000 ft of chain link on the I-15 Reconstruction project.

Founded 45 years ago by the team of Dennis Higgins, Dean Rowley and Shelby Taylor, Mountain States Fence has completed projects from Alaska to southern California and all throughout the western U.S. The firm specializes in all kinds of fencing, including barb wire, chain link and ornamental aluminum.

The firm is now led by general manager Rick Higgins, Dennis' son who worked at the company from 1967 to 1973, before pursuing a career in law. Higgins successfully practiced law until 1985, when he was lured back into the construction industry.

"When Dean retired, he asked if I'd be interested in coming back," says Higgins, who was doing general litigation work for the most part. "I took a long, hard look at it, and decided to do it. The (fencing) industry doesn't change much, so it wasn't a huge move for me."

Mountain States Fence has provided its services on a number of big commercial projects in recent years, including the installation of 150 miles of barb wire fencing at Hill AFB in Clearfield, more than 133,000 ft of chain link on Bangerter Highway in Salt Lake, and 199,000 ft of chain link on the I-15 Reconstruction project. Another high-profile project which garnered the firm national acclaim was installing Jerith Ornamental Aluminum fencing at the University of Utah's Rice-Eccles Stadium for the 2002 Olympic Plaza, a pro-

ject that earned a front page story in World Fence News back in '02.

Higgins says Mountain States completes anywhere from 1,000 to 1,500 jobs annually, depending on project size, scope and complexity.

The rising cost of steel has been perhaps the biggest challenge in recent times >>



Rick Higgins, general manager of Mountain States Fence, served as 2007 chairman of the Associated Builders and Contractors of Utah.

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for the company. Higgins says steel is up approximately 60% this year, with indications that it will keep climbing.

"Our chain link went up 20% on June 1, and we expected another 8-10% hike July 1," Higgins says. "It's a challenge to be competitive. It's tough when you're bidding a job that may not start in a year or two, to try and guess what (material prices) are going to be. So we're having to qualify all of our bids – we can't absorb these costs."

"We've had some outstanding contracts that we got stuck with," he adds. "It squeezes your margins a lot."

Higgins says he enjoys working with general contractors in the region, and feels fortunate to be involved with good organizations like the Associated Builders and Contractors (ABC) of Utah, where he served as chairman in 2007.

"We have really good relationships with almost all the generals," he says. "Contractors in Utah, and to a certain extent the entire Intermountain area, are good people who are good to work with and they



Mountain States Fence installed the stylish ornamental aluminum fence at the 2002 Olympic Plaza site at Rice-Eccles Stadium at the University of Utah.

pay their bills, which isn't always true in other parts of the country."

As for being active with associations, Higgins says "We feel a strong obligation that if your community supports you and makes it possible for all of us to make a living, then we need to give something

back. Typically speaking, your more professional contractors and construction people belong to associations. It's stimulating and enjoyable to be involved with these organizations – we get a lot out of it. It gives us an opportunity to participate in the industry." <<