

Road contractor building on

By PAT KINNEY
Courier Staff Writer

Robins Jackson and his brother had a small building construction company in Emmetsburg more than 40 years ago.

Now, Jackson and his son Steve are running a company in charge of \$25 million worth of highway construction in downtown Waterloo.

The elder Jackson is chairman of the board and chief executive officer of Cedar Valley Corp., based in Waterloo. Steve Jackson is company president.

This past year Cedar Valley landed two major contracts for large segments of relocated U.S. Highway 218 through downtown Waterloo.

Steve Jackson estimates that during the peak of construction activity last year, the company carried a \$1.2 million payroll in Black Hawk County with roughly 270 people employed during the course of construction, of which 166 were from Waterloo, Black Hawk County or surrounding counties. The work represents more than 55,000 work hours. Most of that came from the relocated Highway 218 work.

"Most all our subs (subcontractors) are also local, and really all the work going into the project," Steve Jackson said. "I don't know how each dollar transfers out, but the dollars are really going to all stay in the community, and I suppose that trickles down all through the suppliers, so I think it's real valuable that way."

"That big construction program has to be an economic benefit to Waterloo, there's no question about it," Robins Jackson said.

The company also has work locally on a number of smaller projects. Cedar Valley also normally does roughly more than half its work throughout Iowa and in several surrounding states — which also brings outside dollars into the community.

Though Cedar Valley is located in Waterloo, getting a local job on the millions in interstate highway substitution work being done here is not a sure thing because the projects are

competitively bid.

For example, the newly completed segment of relocated U.S. Highway 218 barely a mile west of Cedar Valley's Wagner Road offices was done by a Sioux City firm. A difference of some \$100,000 in bidding on a couple of recently let projects narrowly kept Cedar Valley from getting some \$8 million worth of work locally.

Asked what it takes to get a successful bid, Don Taylor, project manager for Cedar Valley's downtown 218 work, said, "You have to be a little lucky and you have to be very, very astute."

The company had bid on a number of metro area interstate highway substitution projects, winning some smaller projects prior to being awarded the downtown relocated 218 work.

"We've had a lot, but these are the big, main sizable projects, that contributed a lot to Waterloo and also to our workload," Robins Jackson said.

"There's quite a bit more (interstate substitution) money to be invested this year. It's going to be a large program," he said.

Projects such as the downtown 218 work are the kind where Cedar Valley excels, Steve Jackson said.

"Downtown is a highly complex, highly staged job, and a lot of management requirements. That's really where we feel our expertise is in our firm, in difficult, high management type projects," he said.

"This is a little unusual, but the state specified on these two jobs the prime contractor have a full-time project manager on the job," Steve Jackson explained. "We've always done that but the state never specified that...I certainly think that it gives the job a lot more continuity, and does the best job of expediting the job you can do."

The two downtown segments of relocated 218 that Cedar Valley is working on will be done over the next two years.

The first project is from 10th Street west to Highway 63, including construction of northbound and south-

bound service roads and cross streets, except for bridge construction. The second project runs from Black Hawk Creek west to Forrester Avenue near the Sherwood Park area, where the already constructed segment of relocated 218 ends, including the reconstruction and relocation of Ansbrough Avenue and Rainbow Drive near the National Cattle Congress grounds. About nine or 10 stages of work are involved in each job.

The first project, which began last summer, has a 1991 completion date and the second is to be completed in 1992.

The first project is "about 56-57 percent done," Taylor said. "We feel like we've kind of got the tough end out of the way, with some hard work left to go, and some difficult utilities to get in the ground," he said.

Almost all major utilities have done extensive relocation and other work in the highway corridor. For example, Robins Jackson said, that's one reason why the segment of West Fourth Street from Jefferson to Washington streets took a good amount of time to complete last summer.

Of the Fourth Street project, Taylor said, "All of the utilities that you can name except for cablevision had buried utilities and they all had to be renovated. Because when the street's removed is the only chance you have to do that. And we got all that dug up and we had some extremely abnormal rainfall."

But he added, "We had terrific cooperation from the utilities throughout the project. There wasn't a day that passed that we didn't find some new unexpected wrinkle that had to be dealt with. A telephone cable that was blocking a storm sewer, or a sanitary sewer service that had to be traced down, or an underground electrical service that was decaying and needed to be upgraded. Just the whole rainbow gamut of what you'd expect to find."

Steve Jackson noted that there's another spinoff economic benefit

community's economic base

because of the employment created by utility relocations on highway substitution projects, for which utilities are reimbursed. Some of the trenching work related to utilities also was contracted out to local firms, Taylor said.

The road construction work will continue. "There'll be a lot of work for three more years. There's some major projects to be let," Steve Jackson said.

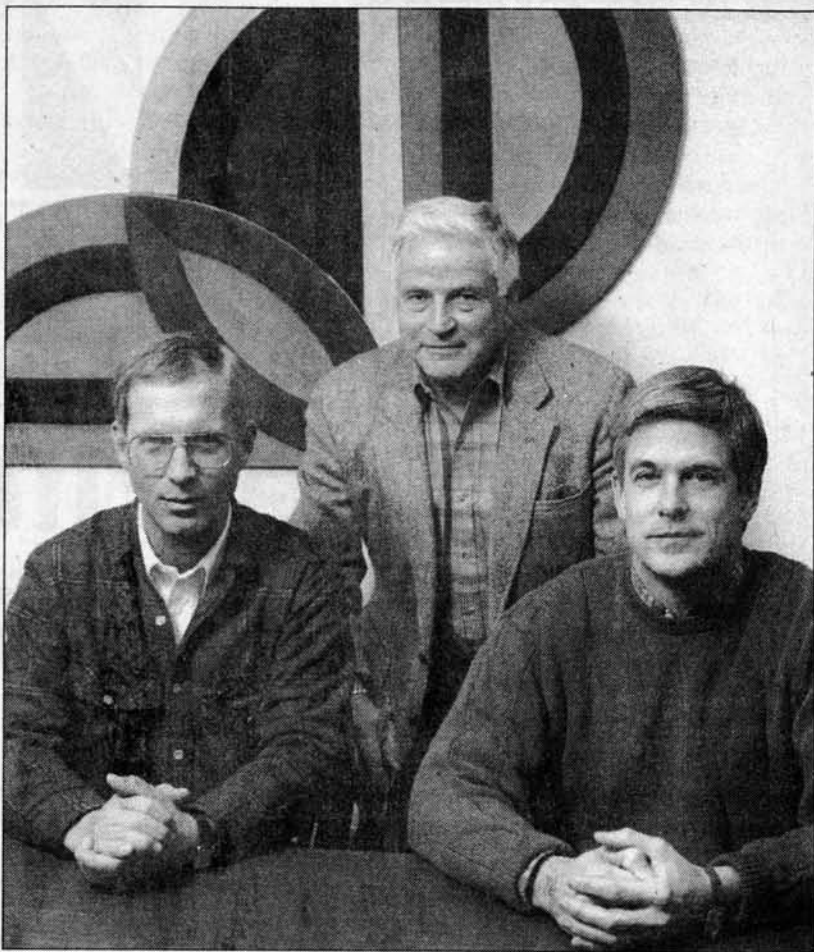
That work includes the completion of relocated 218, construction of relocated Highway 58 in Cedar Falls and, in the longer term, possible construction work related to the Avenue of the Saints project.

In addition, a considerable amount of resurfacing work on existing roads will be done before the state of Iowa transfers jurisdiction over University Avenue and other existing highway routes to the cities once new roads like relocated 218 are completed.

The roads themselves also should be of long-term benefit, Steve and Robins Jackson said.

"Having 218 open all the way, it should help the Waterloo airport. You'd hope it'd help downtown Waterloo," Steve Jackson said.

"I think probably now, with a better road system here, people will be able to get into Waterloo," Robins Jackson said. "They probably won't want to go straight on through like they were to start with...It'll be quite a road system we didn't have before."



Courier photo by DAN NIERLING

Cedar Valley Corp. of Waterloo is the general contractor for two major segments of work on relocated U.S. Highway 218 through town. Pictured, from left to right, are Don Taylor, Cedar Valley's 218 project manager; Cedar Valley board chairman and chief executive officer Robins Jackson; and company president Steve Jackson.

Cedar Valley Corp. marks 20th anniversary

It was formed in 1971, when its parent company, United Jackson Companies, purchased the assets of Diesch Constructors, which had operated in Waterloo for the previous 15 years.

Robins Jackson, company chairman and CEO of Cedar Valley Corp., joined his brother Bill's construction business, Jackson Construction Co., in 1948. Founded in 1946, the business was relocated to the city of Nevada in 1957.

Jackson Construction had completed numerous projects in the Waterloo-Cedar Falls area from the late 1950s through 1971, the largest being the six-lane reconstruction of Highway 218 in 1970.

Jackson Construction relocated to Shreveport, La.,

in 1980, where it operated in Louisiana and Texas for three or four years. In 1986, Cedar Valley and United Jackson located all operations in Cedar Valley's present location at 2637 Wagner Road.

A graduate of Iowa State University, Robins Jackson is currently vice president of Associated General Contractors of America, and is scheduled to become national president in February, 1992 — only the fifth national president from Iowa and the first from this state since Fred Mast of Waterloo held the position in 1968.

United Jackson also is part owner of Aspro Inc., 3613 Texas St., and Basic Materials Corp., 2625 W. Airline Highway.