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## California Construction

### Feature Story - December 2005

#### School Construction Following Population Surge

*By Greg Aragon*

Kern County is known for its rich oil fields, fertile farmland and country music pioneers such as Merle Haggard and Buck Owens.

But things are changing rapidly.

Today, the county of 750,000 residents, 11 incorporated cities and more than 8,000 sq. mi., is one of the fastest-growing regions in the country. The majority of this growth is in Bakersfield, the county's most populous city with 279,700 residents.



*Photo by Greg Aragon*

"It's a boom; we're going crazy here," said Danny Ordiz, principal with Bakersfield-based Ordiz-Melby Architects, Inc., a company with about 45 projects under construction or in planning in the county that total more than 1 million sq. ft. and \$230 million in construction costs .

"What's driving the growth is cheap land costs, which has drawn in major developers," Ordiz added.

"This is one of the last places in the state where there is affordable housing," added Don Renfro, principal architect with Bakersfield-based Renfro & Cunningham, a firm that is working on 11 major projects worth about \$200 million in construction costs. "And people are moving here from L.A and San Francisco to [start] new lives."

With the median price for an existing home at about \$200,000-a 36-percent increase from the same time last year, but more than \$300,000 less than the median home price in neighboring Ventura and Los Angeles counties to the south-Kern County is welcoming an estimated 20,000 new residents a year.

In Bakersfield, there were 4,123 permits issued between January and September for single-family homes, for a value of \$653 million. Jim Eggert, the city's principal planner, said permits are on pace to equal or slightly pass last year's total of 4,222 (\$654 million).

To help educate some of the county's new inhabitants, Ordiz-Melby and Renfro & Cunningham, have designed two single-level, wood-framed high schools.

One is the \$60-million Frontier High School in Bakersfield, which broke ground in January and is midway through the construction schedule. Bakersfield-based Colombo Construction Co., is serving as construction manager for the 200,000-sq.-ft., 15-building project.

Frontier High will open with freshman and sophomore classes. The latter class will come from Liberty, Centennial, North and Stockdale high schools. Freshman will come from Freedom, Norris and Rio Bravo Greeley middle schools.

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The other campus is the \$70-million "High School No. 2" in Delano, a city of 31,000 people, 30 mi. northwest of Bakersfield. Currently in planning review, the 10-building school should break ground in mid-2006 and be completed by the end of 2008. Bakersfield-based S.C. Anderson Inc. is the construction manager.

"Both schools are similar and use a contemporary style of design," Renfro said. "They will definitely fit into their surroundings and address the concerns of each city."

Another big project in Bakersfield is the \$21-million Kern Schools Federal Credit Union, which was designed by Fresno-based Teter a+e Architects and Engineers. The 144,000-sq.-ft. project features two identical 72,000-sq.-ft. office buildings, and is scheduled to be completed this month.

The three-story structures, built by Bakersfield-based Wallace & Smith Contractors, is seeking a LEED rating.

"One of the LEED highlights of this project is that we worked with a heat-island effect to reduce the heat islands on site by introducing a large amount of concrete paving in the parking lot and using larger trees and landscaping," said Loren Aiton, a senior Architect with Teter and the LEED-accredited professional architect on the project.

The heat-island effect is when dark pavement and roofing surfaces heat up during the day and raise the surrounding air temperature by as much 5 degrees Fahrenheit, Aiton said. He added that on this project, about 30 percent of the parking lot is concrete, where as on "a regular project you may have nothing but the driveway approaches, which might be only 2 or 3 percent."

About 20 mi. northwest of Bakersfield, in the town of Shafter, Richmond, Va.-based Performance Food Group is developing a 40-acre site with a \$35- million, 125,000-sq.-ft. distribution warehouse for large chain restaurants such as TGI Friday's, Mimi's Café and Outback Steakhouse. The concrete tilt-up facility is located off of Lerdo Highway and Highway 99.

The project is on a previously unused parcel of land on the eastern edge of Shafter Airport. Performance Food bought the property from the Minter Field Airport District, which manages Shafter Airport.

"This is very exciting for the city," said Jeremy Tobais, director of community and economic development for Shafter. "Performance Food has opened up a new piece of industrial land for the city to develop."

Tobais said the development should bring the city of 13,700 residents about \$100,000 a year in property taxes. Lebanon, Tenn.-based Manous Consulting & Design Inc. designed the building; Bakersfield-based Klassen Corp. is building it.

The project broke ground in October and will be finished next month.

Back down the runway in Bakersfield, the new \$36-million William M. Thomas Air Terminal opened last month at Meadows Field. The 64,800-sq.- ft. facility features three air-conditioned jet bridges that were designed by North Carolina-based Odell & Associates.

The three-level terminal is replacing a 12,000-sq.-ft. terminal that was built in 1955, which became too small for the 150,000 people a year that travel through Meadows Field, said Jack Gotcher, operations manager for Kern County Department of Airports.

The new facility, built by S.C. Anderson Inc. is equipped with the latest in security technology, including monitoring systems, access control systems, and cameras. Passengers will also be able to hook up to the Internet via dial-up, high-speed or wireless connections.

"We're bringing this airport up from where it had almost no renovation or upgrade since 1960, to being able to provide all of the transportation capabilities that the community needs," Gotcher said.

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