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Arizon Companies puts roof over Flipper's head

Company builds tension structure over Miami Seaquarium tank

Miami, FL—When Hurricane Wilma hit South Florida last year, it took a heavy toll on one of Biscayne Bay's most famous tourist attractions—the Miami Seaquarium. The storm killed all of the park's prized fish, sharks and turtles, and damaged many of the park's structures. One of those structures, though, the park's famous dolphin stadium—home of the *Flipper* TV show from the 1960s—was already slated for renovation.

To enclose the newly renovated stadium, the Seaquarium turned to Arizona Companies of St. Louis, Mo.

"They gave us the liberty to create a few different approaches," says German Buitrago, the company's director of engineering and design. The Seaquarium directors met with the designer in charge of the remodeling project and, together, they chose one of our designs. We got our production team started right away."

While most companies in the structural design industry subcontract the production of their building materials, Arizona employs a different approach. The company designs and manufactures its own fabric and steel cabling—the key ingredients of a tension structure—at its Miami, Fla.-based fabrication plant.

Says Buitrago: "We don't believe in hiring someone else to manufacture our fabric and cabling. We do it all in-house, which gives us better control of our production schedule. As a result, our quality stays high and we're often quicker to install."

"For the dolphin tank, we started fabricating the steel frame late last year," explains Buitrago. "We installed the frame by December and, four weeks after that, the fabric was installed as well."

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The fabric Arizon used for the installation, called *Arizon-Opaque*, is very strong. And considering the effects of Hurricane Wilma last year, it needs to be. That's why the City of Miami requires such structures withstand up to 90 mph winds.

“Our tension structures are strong because the fabric is laced into the structural frame, which is then held in tension by steel aircraft cables.” Buitrago adds. “The canopy we created for this installation is actually designed to be removable in winds of hurricane speeds, although some of our structures are designed to withstand wind speeds exceeding 150mph.”

Arizon produced and installed the fabric in 16 different sections, which required a little more than a week to have tension applied via the cabling. In total, the installation took less than nine weeks.

“The new covering we designed makes use of a cantilever system,” he said. “It extends about 25 feet out from the back of the seating area toward the center of the tank. So even Flipper has a great view of our work.”

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About Arizon Companies

Arizon Companies manufacture and install three unique, industry-leading product lines: Johnson Air Rotation Systems, MarCraft Custom Air Handling Systems, and Arizon Air, Frame and Tension Structures. To learn more about Arizon Companies—or any of its product lines—visit www.arizoncompanies.com or call Barbara Scheer in our St. Louis, Mo., office at (800) 325-1303.