



**MONTGOMERY BUSINESS JOURNAL** | THE NUMBER ONE BUSINESS SOURCE FOR MONTGOMERY AND THE RIVER REGION | MONTGOMERY AREA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

#### MBJ HOME

#### 2011 ISSUES

May  
April  
March  
February  
January

#### 2010 ISSUES

November/December  
October  
September  
August  
July  
June  
May  
April  
March  
February  
January

#### 2009 ISSUES

November/December  
October  
September  
August  
July

#### COVER STORIES

#### CENTERSPREAD

#### INVESTOR PROFILES

#### Q&A

#### MEMBER PROFILES

#### MEMBER NEWS

#### ECONOMIC INTEL

#### ADVERTISING

#### EVENTS

#### CHAMBER HOME

#### JOB BOARD

#### LOGIN

#### NEW USER LOGIN

Search:  >>

### TCU Consulting Projects

**MONTGOMERY COUNTY  
DETENTION FACILITY  
AND ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE BUILDING  
CONVERSION**

\*

#### MEMBER PROFILE

### TCU Consulting



### Perfect Harmony

#### TCU Consulting is run by two owners – one black, one white

October 2009

by Tom Ensey

The owners of TCU Consulting would like to see their business model become business as usual in the River Region. Ken Upchurch III is white, Percy Thomas is black. Both ran their own construction companies before they joined forces to form TCU in 2005.

The company offers advice and oversight in planning, budgeting, scheduling, bidding and the actual construction of building projects large and small.

Before going into business together, Upchurch and Thomas shared a mutual respect, and between them, they had years of experience, expertise and contacts.

"We'd been friends, competitors and workmates for 30 years," said Upchurch, who studied the concept of starting a program management company for "four or five years" before he felt the time was right.

He also felt the Montgomery business climate was right for him to seek a black partner. Thomas concurred.

Upchurch said Thomas, who worked with his six brothers in Thomas Construction and Masonry, fit his idea of a partner.

"We'd worked together so long, we came from the same business culture and I liked his business ethics," said Upchurch, who still runs his

**ALABAMA STATE UNIVERSITY'S**  
EDUCATION BUILDING, STUDENT  
HOUSING RENOVATION AND STUDENT  
UNION FACILITY

\*

**MONTGOMERY ACADEMY**  
CAMPUS FACILITY UPGRADES

\*

**MONTGOMERY PUBLIC SCHOOLS**  
FACILITY PLAN, PHASE I

\*

**MONTGOMERY YMCA**  
CAPITAL BUILDING PROGRAM

own construction company, as does Thomas. "He had grown his company the old-fashioned way. He got in there and knocked heads. He got where he was with hard work."

It didn't take long to see that the partnership was a good one. The Montgomery County Commission was their first customer, which came as a surprise.

Upchurch said he asked then-Montgomery County Commission Chairman Todd Strange if the new company could interview for the county jail project "for the practice, mostly."

Upchurch said the Commission interviewed several large companies from across the Southeast before their turn came.

"My partner handled the introduction – I was going to talk about the technical stuff," he said.

Thomas made an impact with his first sentence.

"We're a local firm and we pay local taxes," he said. They got the bid.

The Montgomery County Detention Facility came in under budget after paying TCU its fee. The surplus allowed the county to do other building projects.

"All our clients will tell you we have saved them money," Upchurch said.

It's a small company with about a dozen employees, Upchurch said from the headquarters on Bell Road. That's good for the customer, he said.

"You pick up the phone, you get one of the principals," he said.

Clients have come in quick succession, among them a \$165 million building project by Montgomery County Public Schools, about \$200 million at AlabamaState, and smaller projects, including a \$7 million job for MontgomeryAcademy and \$4 million for the YMCA.

The success came after a rocky start that saw negative newspaper articles, skepticism about Thomas's and Upchurch's relationship, and an ugly, public lawsuit about the project at ASU. A judge threw the case out on summary judgment, Upchurch said.

Thomas said he felt pressure in his own community.

"Some people thought I should have gone into business with another black," Thomas said.

Upchurch said the black-white issue is not an issue in the company because of their shared ethics. And they have no choice but to get along, he said.

"We don't have a third party to mitigate our disputes," he said. "We're it."

He was disappointed at the opposition they encountered.

"I would have thought that the community would have recognized what we were doing," he said. "That maybe making money could cross racial lines, and that might serve as an incentive to follow our example instead of questioning it, and get past some of the street talk."

But both men agree that's behind them and they believe they have earned the respect of the business community.

"This is a 50-50 partnership," Thomas said. "We've managed to open doors on both sides, the white and black communities. They have to see that a black and a white can work together for the betterment of the community."



41 Commerce Street, P.O. Box 79, Montgomery, Alabama 36101  
Tel: 334.834.5200 Fax: 334.265.4745

Copyright © 2009-2010 Montgomery Area Chamber of  
Commerce/Montgomery Business Journal. All Rights Reserved.