

EPS Geofoam Raises Stockton Theater Experience to New Heights

Moviegoers are flocking to theaters with stadium-style seating because every seat in the house offers an excellent view of the movie screen. To create these unobstructed views, more and more of the stadium-style seating systems are being supported by EPS Geofoam, which is made of the same expanded polystyrene that Hollywood production crews sculpt into movie sets.

The newly opened \$10 million City Centre Cinemas in Stockton, California, are no exception to the Geofoam trend. Instead of a framework of steel studs and plywood or a million or more pounds of concrete, the seats in the theater's 16 auditoriums are firmly supported by Geofoam manufactured by Falcon Foam. On top of the foam base, the contractor placed waterproof gypsum board, a layer of metal and then 4 to 6 inches of concrete. The first floor auditoriums came in several sizes with the largest standing 40 feet above ground level. A second-story U-shaped mezzanine houses the projection room.

"The big trend is the stadium seating," according to Bob Boggiano, project superintendent with Stockton-based F&H Construction. Anytime Boggiano can use Geofoam for a theater project, he prefers it.

"It's just an easy way to do it," Boggiano said. "It's cheap. It's fast."

An upswing in the price of steel is another reason he selects Geofoam instead of a metal beam and pan construction. And he likes the ease of hoisting, handling and installation of Geofoam because of its light weight. The only metal on the Stockton theater Geofoam project were the rebar and facers, and some metal pans used to create the inclined walkways to the auditoriums. Another benefit of Geofoam in stadium-style seating includes filling a useless void under the seats in the building.

In addition to the benefits of Geofoam, working with Falcon Foam helped with the installation, Boggiano explained.

"This company, you give them plans and it comes all pre-cut and numbered," he said. It took just one-and-a-half days to place the foam into the 16 auditoriums with unskilled laborers doing the work. That was a savings of a week-and-a-half.

Mike Marsh, who is an account manager for White Cap Pro-Contractors Supply in Stockton, also said it was an "excellent" experience to work with Falcon Foam.

"Foam is foam," said Marsh explaining it was more than just the product that resulted in Falcon being specified for the job. It was the customer service.

The Falcon Foam design team in Byron Center, Michigan, took the construction plans and composed a diagram so the F&H crew knew where to place the blocks at the jobsite like a jigsaw puzzle. This also saves on waste at the job site. The foam blocks normally provide enough friction over their surface to be self-securing but galvanized steel connector plates were added to

fully immobilize them. Each block is manufactured to 32 inches by 42 inches by 46 inches in size. Unique sizes were kept to a minimum to simplify installation.

Falcon Foam is a subsidiary of Atlas Roofing Corporation headquartered in Atlanta. Falcon Foam offers a wide range of products, including EPS foam for cold storage buildings, roof and wall insulation for recreational vehicles, and packaging. Geofoam is a generic term for EPS foam installed below grade.

The 16-screen movie theater, which is located at one end of a downtown plaza, is an architectural highlight of Stockton's urban redevelopment efforts. Some underutilized vacant buildings were razed to make way for the theaters. In their place sits the theater and an 80-foot steel-framed rotunda to mark the theater entrance. Inside the rotunda, specialty glass and porcelain panels round out the rotunda dome. The panels glow from the light of eight interior skylights aimed at the panels. The colored lights can be changed to be appropriate for every occasion from Christmas to Valentines Day.

"It was an element that the city felt would enhance the entrance to the building being it was at an end of a plaza," said Terry Woo, the project's architect with Uesugi & Associates of San Francisco.

The Stockton Cinemas are operated by Signature Theatres, which operates 281 screens, located in 31 sites in 25 cities in California, Hawaii and Montana. Signature has worked with developers within other redevelopment districts throughout California in addition to Stockton. (Acquisition of Signature was pending for mid-September 2004 by Regal Entertainment Group.)

In addition to contractors paying less in labor costs for a GeoFoam application, owner representatives are paying more for it because of its advantages. Metal studs and wooden shear walls remain the cheapest, but not necessarily the quietest option for theater construction, according to Signature's vice president of construction Michael Goakey.

"With a foam structure, we don't get squeaking," Goakey said. "That's one nice advantage with concrete over foam, we don't get any sounds out of it."

The theater is 70,505-square-feet in size, with 3,300 seats. Those seats are distributed throughout three different auditorium sizes, including two large 419-seat auditoriums. The medium auditoriums hold about 290 seats and the small ones contain about 220 seats. Adjoining the cinemas is 17,880 square feet of retail space. Atlas Properties was selected to develop the project in August 2002. The City Centre Cinemas were part of the revitalization of the city's Channel Head Master Development Area.

"It's one of our top theaters," Goakey said.

Among the high quality innovations are double concrete walls between auditoriums, making each one virtually sound proof. Also, large amplified speakers behind the movie screen and baffled walls help project state-of-the-art sound at the audience. The City Centre Cinemas opened in December 2003.

In addition to construction-related benefits, Geofoam is easier on the environment. The foam is especially useful for "green" building projects because it has outstanding thermal efficiency, and is recyclable at the end of a buildings useful life. Geofoam by Falcon Foam has superior moisture resistance, and can be cut to special panel shapes and thicknesses. Because Geofoam is made from HCFC-free "green" polystyrene, it is ideal for projects seeking credits from U.S. Green Building Council's LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) rating system.

Geofoam contains some regrind, or post-industrial polystyrene, and the amount can be adjusted during manufacturing to suit the needs of any project, according to Falcon Foam's West Coast sales representative Jerry Jensen. Falcon can measure—to a certainty of 1/10 of 1 percent accuracy—the amount of recycled post-industrial polystyrene in its Geofoam.

This is important to California builders integrating "green" building materials and concepts into their designs for "fast-track" approvals from local governments. Five years ago, the sustainable building movement was considered to be a dream perpetuated by "tree-hugging" environmentalists, according to Jensen.

"Now it's becoming an economic advantage," said Jensen, explaining just a week delay in the approval process can cost developers hundreds of thousands of dollars.

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