



Sun-Times' staffers helped pave the way for a smooth transition from the old building, at 401 N. Wabash (above), to the new location in the Merchandise Mart Apparel Center at 350 N. Orleans (inset above left).

# ONE SMOOTH MOVE

## Contractors praise Sun-Times' staff for teamwork during transition

By David Southwell

What requires 300 workers, 10 months and must be completed without shutting down the operation? Why, moving a newspaper of course. That is what it took to complete the Chicago Sun-Times' amazingly smooth move from its old address on North Wabash Avenue to its new digs at the Merchandise Mart's Apparel Center.

Corporate moves of this magnitude usually take about 18 months and require a lot of aspirin for those involved. Not so for the Sun-Times, according to the mastermind of the move, Ed Ziek of

Savant Services.

Ziek specializes in moving corporate headquarters and possesses intrinsic knowledge of the newspaper industry. He has overseen 70 newspaper moves and said relocating the Sun-Times was a smooth operation despite the usual glitches that plague any transition.

"I would consider this move a 6 or 7 in terms of success, but it's a 10 because we got out the paper without missing an edition," Ziek said. "There were a lot of glitches, but typically in a newspaper move I bring in an enormous staff and I didn't need to this time. The quality of the people here made it totally

unnecessary."

Ziek praised the interdepartmental teamwork of the Sun-Times during the move as well as the mind-set of the editorial staff.

"They watched the workmen as they were building and came to construction meetings," Ziek said. "They made sure their territory was the way they needed it. Newspapers have no egos. Reporters work in any environment. It's never complete when they move in, but a newspaper is an egoless being because everyone is focused on the daily production. Try moving a lawyer ..."

The first phase of the move was demolition of the old business at the Apparel Center to clear space. The new Sun-Times newsroom sits where bridal dresses were once showcased by designers.

"We gutted all the old retail," said Bill Baxa, spokesman for Robinette Demolition. "We also removed the concrete for the perimeter windows. There were no windows there three months ago. A lot of the retail is still beneath and around the Sun-Times space. We took all the walls and ceilings back to raw structure and removed a three-story parking garage where the main entrance is."

A throng of contractors attacked the facility like army ants during the next phase, converting 126,000 square feet of space into a state-of-the-art journalism Mecca.

Contractors were hired for the following needs: iron, millwork, fireproofing, aluminum frames, hardware, class and glazing, drywall, ceramic tile, acoustics, carpeting, painting, AV equipment, toilet accessories, projection screens, window treatments, fire protection, plumbing, HVAC, electric, communications, security, and surveys. Clune Construction was the general contractor coordinating the work.

"It was much more intense than most projects which required us to coordinate our efforts to a much higher degree," Clune spokesman David Langhamer said. "We had to make room for each other to work efficiently. When normal businesses move there is a little slow time to get up and running in a period of days; with a newspaper it's a hard and fast deadline, just like when a newspaper needs to get out. The day they moved in, they were in business and they were on line. There was no margin for error."

Clune had 16 weeks to finish the project of moving the Sun-Times, which sat on the bank of the

Chicago River at Wabash Avenue since 1957.

"It was a very aggressive schedule," Langhamer said. "Our company utilized subcontractors who worked for us in the past 20 years. We had to pick the right foreman from each with the right temperament and skills. In close quarters it's not only important for the know-how, but also the temperament in the fast and frenzied environment."

Clune's subcontractors worked simultaneously with the landlord's, who were creating windows through concrete. The lack of free space forced the window contractor to work at night in order to meet the deadline. More than 200 tradesmen per day were on duty at the site during the project's peak.

"When you have a very quick project it tends to attract the best talent from all the different parties involved," Langhamer said. "It's a 24-hour-a-day operation, so once we turned it over to the Sun-Times we really had to make sure we were complete because there wasn't the luxury of going in to finish work during off hours."

One unique factor in moving a newspaper is migrating off of old systems and incorporating ones such as mainframes and phones. There are 1,754 daily newspapers in America. The Sun-Times now has the newest home in the family.

"They have an unusually talented staff," Ziek said. "The Sun-Times support staff and IT staff is comparable to any professional IT staff of a much larger corporation. The way it worked here and why it was successful from inception was a team effort."

Ziek praised architect Gary Lee, executive managing editor John Barron, assistant to the editor for technology Toby Roberts, advertising director David Ruiz and classified manager Regina Brown, among others.

"There were representatives from each department that were true champions who were in the process every step of the way," Ziek said. "Toby was a workhorse. He took ownership of the editorial department. He was as much a participant in the construction and observations as the contractors. He went down to details like where you hang the backdrops in the photo studio. Normally that's something that a company like ours would do."