

# ENR

Engineering News-Record

# Texas & Louisiana

TOP DESIGN FIRMS ■ TEXAS & LOUISIANA FIRM OF THE YEAR



## Power of Relationships Propels Pape-Dawson

Texas-based company, named ENR Texas & Louisiana's Design Firm of the Year, prioritizes employees and philanthropy **BY APRIL CAPOCHINO MYERS**

**WAREHOUSES** Included among Pape-Dawson's design portfolio is the Amazon SAT6 Distribution Center in San Marcos, Texas.

**Revenue growth** and, more importantly, strong relationships with its clients and the community are evidence of San Antonio-based Pape-Dawson Engineers' success.

Financially, the firm has grown substantially—in 2021, it saw a \$34-million gain in regional revenue over the prior year across Texas to \$178.66 million, prompting the company to hire 150 additional employees.

"Pape-Dawson is blessed with driven, moral individuals who give their best efforts in their professional and personal lives," says Sam Dawson, CEO with the civil engineering firm. "That's a testament to our recruiting team and to the reputation we've carefully fostered in the engineering community to attract such hardworking people to Pape-Dawson. The market for our services sees and respects who we



## GROUNDWORK

Pape-Dawson's team provided surveying services for the Bridges Residential Development, a 115-lot residential project in Crowley, Texas.



**CITY LIVING** Boone Manor in Houston's Museum District is a podium-style, 13-story residential building with nine floors above four levels of parking.



**"In 2019, we set the goal to be the best engineering firm to work for in Texas. Then we had to figure out what that meant."**

—Cara Tackett,  
Senior Vice  
President,  
Pape-Dawson

are and how we do business, and we reap the rewards from new and repeat customers continuing to send us work."

With 764 employees, Pape-Dawson has offices across major metropolitan cities of Texas, including San Antonio, Austin, Houston, Dallas, Fort Worth and New Braunfels. The firm recently opened an office in Corpus Christi and acquired Dowdey, Anderson and Associates in Plano.

"Pape-Dawson is so connected to the city, and they know what's going on at all times," says John Kirk, managing director and executive vice president with Embrey, a San Antonio-based real estate investment company. "They have a great pulse for what's going on and are able to stay out in front of code changes and anything impacting our work. If we miss one little thing in this line of work, it could be catastrophic. Pape-Dawson is a top-notch group based on their expertise, their great talent; and they are very organized. We have a great relationship with them, and they work on all of our projects in San Antonio proper."

Pape-Dawson has an extensive portfolio of projects, including an urban infill project for Embrey, work at Sea World of San Antonio and flood studies for Harris County Flood Control District following 2017's Hurricane Harvey. The firm has also worked on Boone Manor, a podium-style, 13-story residential building with nine floors above four levels of parking in Houston's Museum District; the Bridges Residential Development in Crowley, Texas; and the Navistar Assembly Plant in San Antonio. One of its larg-

est projects is the Vista Ridge Regional Supply Project, a 142-mile pipeline from Burleson to Bexar County.

"The Vista Ridge Project [goes] through seven counties, crossing under three rivers, under major highways and across 512 parcels of land," says Mark Rose, project director with Central Texas Regional Water Supply Corp., in a video for Pape-Dawson. "The key to the success of this project has been Pape-Dawson Engineering. You can hire a good engineering firm, you can hire a good public relations firm, you can hire a good environmental services firm, and you can hire a good legal team. Very rarely can you find all of those disciplines under the umbrella of one firm. Never have I seen it work as well as the Vista Ridge Pipeline project under the leadership of Pape-Dawson."

## Making Connections

Gus Pape and Gene Dawson Sr., founded Pape-Dawson in San Antonio in 1965. While the firm has grown substantially over the last 57 years, it has endured its fair share of challenges from the pandemic while managing to maintain its core business values.

"Pape-Dawson started as a family business, and much of our leadership's tenure with the firm exceeds 30 years. COVID pushed us to change in ways that do not come easily for us

more 'experienced' engineers. But the change has been fantastic, and the employees have embraced change and risen to meet the challenge," says Cara Tackett, senior vice president. "In 2019, we set the goal to be the best engineering firm to work for in Texas. Then we had to figure out what that meant. The pandemic spurred us to ask our employees that very question."

With employee input, the firm came up with a flexible work policy. "We saw productivity go up while commitment to projects and our corporate culture remained strong," Tackett says. "While our employees voted to embrace some remote work and leaning into technology, they overwhelmingly agreed being in the office and connecting with each other at least three days a week is critical. We are very proud that our investment in technology in 2019 put us ahead of the curve in 2020 and that our employees kept up with their responsibilities and stayed connected."

The firm is excited about its newest project, Project Connect, in Austin, Tackett says. This project will help alleviate traffic congestion and unite Austin through bus and light rail transit. Pape-Dawson is lending planning and engineering expertise to relocate water and wastewater utilities and looking at utility conflicts.

"Considering the construction of transit stations, underground and aboveground railway infrastructure and other facilities, the conflict analysis and planning effort is consid-



erable,” Tackett says. “The project will be years in the making and cries out for complex discussions across multiple stakeholders to find solutions that will work for everyone.”

While Pape-Dawson values its projects for large cities, it is also invested in working with smaller and mid-size communities on “transformative projects,” Tackett says.

The firm was recently selected by Sherman, Texas, as program manager for the city’s capital improvement program. Pape-Dawson will oversee the delivery of utility projects needed to serve Texas Instruments’ \$30-billion investment in a new microchip manufacturing facility as well as delivering all the capital projects included in Sherman’s current capital improvement program. The Texas Instruments projects will utilize the construction manager at-risk (CMAR) delivery method, while the other community projects will likely utilize more traditional delivery methods.

“The project will allow us to contribute to the success of bringing a phenomenal economic generator to Sherman as well as allowing us to work daily with the city of Sherman, other engineers and contractors in North Texas,” Tackett says.

Pape-Dawson is also providing program oversight of the North Tarrant Express (NTE) projects, which will relieve congestion and improve highway efficiency and safety along north I-35W, northeast I-820 and SH121/183 Airport Freeway through a regionally supported TEXpress Lane system. Under the general engineering consulting (GEC) contract, Pape-Dawson will oversee design, construction, maintenance, operations and tolling activities for NTE Segments 1&2, 3A, 3B and 3C between downtown Fort Worth and DFW Airport.

“This is a great ongoing project and an incredible partnership between TxDOT, Pape-Dawson, North Tarrant Express Mobility Partners, local leaders and officials,” says Carl Johnson, Fort Worth district engineer. “The North Tarrant Express project continues to enhance safety and mobility. This project has proven to be an economic generator for DFW.”

Beyond its project work, Pape-Dawson is committed to giving back to its communities through philanthropic efforts. In 2021, the firm raised and donated \$250,000 to charities across Texas, including Seton Home, Ronald McDonald House Charities of San Antonio, Meals on



Wheels, St. PJ’s Children’s Home and Fisher House, all in San Antonio; West Houston Assistance Ministries in Houston; Hope Supply Co. in Dallas; National Alliance on Mental Illness in Central Texas; Austin Angels and Mobile Loaves & Fishes, both in Austin; Connections Individual and Family Services in New Braunfels; and The Women’s Center in Fort Worth.

“Everyone at Pape-Dawson knows if all we do is produce plans and reports and put projects on the ground, then we have failed as a company,” says Mark Ramseur, managing principal for Pape-Dawson in Central Texas. “We must be bigger and better than that. We try to maintain a high level of engagement with nonprofits in our markets through volunteerism and sponsorships, and we established the foundation to help funnel our employees’ direct donations to make significant impact to the operations of these organizations. Firmwide, we are relentlessly focused on bettering the communities we live and work in, and that is a big part of how and why we’ve been so successful.” ■

**MIXED-USE DEVELOPMENT**  
Another recent project for Pape-Dawson’s team is the Domain South End District in Austin.

**GIVING BACK** Pape-Dawson employees volunteer at Headwaters at the Comal, a conservation legacy project at the Comal River in New Braunfels, Texas.

## ON THE WEB

For more on specialty contractors across the **Texas & Louisiana region**, visit [enr.com/texas-louisiana](https://enr.com/texas-louisiana).



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