

A special section:

Construction, design & engineering

Steel buildings shed that 'tin-can' look

By Nancie Hudson

Newly erected steel frames that tower over construc-tion sites have become routine sights for commuters. But why are so many new buildings being constructed with steel rather than wood frames? And why is the steel building — made with steel frames, steel walls and a steel roof becoming more commonplace?

Many people choose steel because of its cost, according to Dave Trombley, marketing and administration manage for Maverick Construction

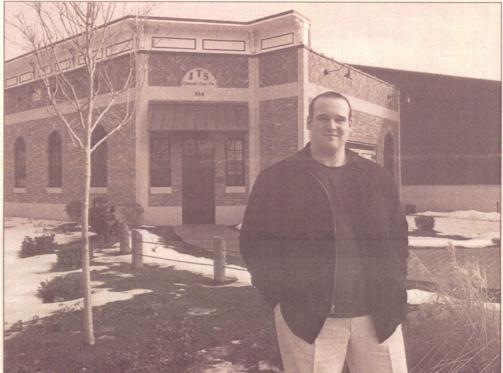
Inc.
"Usually we can beat out a

"Usually we can beat out a wood frame price with a steel building, so that's the key benefit," Trombley says from his Kalamazoo office. "That's why most of what we do is steel."

There are two different systems of metal building,
Trombley says. Structural steel is the widely used system in which steel is fabricated locally and constructed on ed locally and constructed on site according to an architect's plans and/or an engineer's designs. Pre-engineered steel designs. Fre-engineered steel is the newer system that uses steel fabricated by a national manufacturer, and the build-ing is assembled according to kit-like instructions. The steel is the same, but the buildings are constructed differently.

pre-engineered steel building in downtown Kala-mazoo Maverick Construction built last year for One Way Products won recognition from Metal Construction News, a monthly trade publication based in Woodville, Ohio, for being one of the top five metal buildings in the nation for 2002, Trombley says. Built with a brick veneer feede and other features to facade and other features to gacade and other features to make it resemble 1940s era structures, the building also won two awards last year from ABC, Associated Builders and Contractors in Grand Rapids, for excel-lence in construction. "Steal was good for the On

lence in construction.
"Steel was good for the One
Way Products building
because with steel, you can
get good clear spans, heights
and widths across the building



"Usually we can beat out a wood frame price with a steel building, so that's the key benefit," says Maverick Construction Inc.'s Dave Trombley, in front of a brick-facaded steel building Maverick built for One Way Products in Kalamazoo. "That's why most of what we do is steel."

and you can do it for a relatively cheap amount,"
Trombley says. "So for a good industrial building like that, steel was a perfect fit."
There are certain applications when steel is accessory.

tions when steel is nec in construction, notes Doug Sparling, vice president of the steel division at **Pioneer** General Contractors Inc.

"If you're going to get a span a little bit longer or Aspan a little bit longer or if you're going to have a heavy roof load or floor load, or if you want overhead cranes in your buildings, generally steel gives you a longer span between bearing walls," he explains from his Grand Rapids office.

and have spans up to 400 feet, Sparling says. High school gymnasiums built with steel have spans ranging from 110 have spans ranging from 110 feet to 150 feet. But in typical industrial buildings such as factories, spans average 30 or 40 feet.

Business owners who are planning to build new facili-ties should consider steel, but not only because of its lesser cost and larger span capabili-ties, Sparling adds. When buildings are constructed using steel frames rather than wood frames, the building is

Huge sports arenas such as the new Ford Field built for the Detroit Lions in downtown framed building could accommodate the addition of overmore durable and more versahead crane rail systems at some future time, whereas a wood framed building would

Recent steel projects built by Pioneer General Contract-ors include the steel frames for Spectrum Health's heart center and Saint Mary's Mercy Medical Center can-cer center, both currently under construction in down-

town Grand Rapids.

Most of the buildings

Maverick Construction builds with steel range in size from 10,000 to 50,000 to 120,000

square feet, but Trombley says "we're getting very competi-tive with smaller buildings of 5,000 or 6,000 feet, too.

Many people underestimate the versatility of pre-engi-neered steel buildings,

Sparling notes.
"You could take a steel pre-engineered building and put a brick or a stucco veneer on it or some higher end wall pan-els," he explains. "They don't have to have that tin-can look. You can really dress them up to look like anything you want."

Nancie Hudson is a freelance writer living in Portage.