

# Meet Sellen Special Projects

Introducing Sellen Special Projects: a team of tenant improvement experts with the passion and skill to get the job done right, no matter the size.

BY: CONNOR DAVIS

As one of Seattle's largest general contractors, Sellen has built a reputation for delivering projects that have transformed the cityscape for nearly 75 years. What you might not know, however, is that through all that time we've also been hard at work on an entirely different breed of project: smaller build-outs and renovations.

Though smaller than their behemoth brethren, these tenant improvement projects are often just as complex but in fundamentally different ways. Many are located within occupied office buildings and healthcare campuses, requiring a deft touch from field crews to complete their work without disrupting neighboring areas.

Aside from their sheer size, the most significant difference is the rapid pace of the work. While most major projects usually require months of careful planning before the first shovel touches the ground, the life cycle of a tenant improvement project is often 12 weeks or less. To excel at these projects, contractors need to be adaptive, creative and responsive.

That's where Sellen Special Projects comes in.

Sellen has worked on a variety of small projects for decades with a group of project managers, superintendents, engineers and craftspeople that have dedicated their careers to this specialized type of work. Equipped with the independence of a small firm and the resources of the region's largest, this team is doing great work for long-time partners and new clients alike.

## Right Time, Right Leader

Jeremiah Shakespeare, director of Sellen Special Projects, joined Sellen in 2008 as a senior project engineer and primarily led small *(continued on page 8)*

### CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:

An office tenant improvement for Classmates.com at Century Square; Special Projects has built multiple projects for Stoel Rives at One Union Square; a highly complex hybrid operating room at Swedish First Hill





PHOTO: BENJAMIN BENSCHNEIDER



PHOTO: ANDREW FOGUE

## Alexis Thompson

### Post Construction Manager

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#### With Sellen Since 2013

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**Fun Fact:** She's a big believer in yoga and is an instructor in her spare time.

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When Sellen's crew is packing up to leave the job site for the last time, Alexis Thompson's work is only just beginning. As the post construction manager, she's focused on making sure the spaces Sellen builds operate as efficiently as intended. In other words, if a building was a high-powered sports car, her job is to continuously tune the engine to maximize performance.

"We believe that it's not the building itself that's most important, but what happens inside," Thompson said. "My job is to make sure that when we hand our clients the keys, and it's time to put the pedal to the metal that everything works and we stay on course."

Though the role is new to Sellen and Thompson, it's an ideal fit for

both. For Sellen, it's a continuation of a collaborative, transparent closeout process, bridging the gap between the end of construction and the first full year of operations. For Thompson, it's an opportunity to leverage her skills and passion for sustainability — the founding principal that drives her each day — to reduce the environmental impact of the spaces Sellen creates.

The new post-construction program includes periodic check-ins at critical milestones, as well as mobile tools developed specifically to help owners document and report potential issues. With the right set of tools and effective management, Thompson is positioned to provide Sellen's clients with an additional layer of care and partnership at every turn.

"Even on the best project, things aren't always going to work the way they were designed to. I'm here to make sure they do," Thompson said. "Our crews might be gone, but we are still right there for you."

*"Even though Sellen is a bigger company than they used to be, they haven't lost sight of the little guy. They've maintained the spirit of a small contractor and everything that comes with it."*

— Char Patterson, Principal, JPC Architects



PHOTO: AARON LEITZ

PHOTO: WON MOC

projects for CHI Franciscan Health and Swedish Medical Center, two of Sellen's longest running relationships. He worked closely with both organizations to understand their missions and tailor an approach specific to their needs.

"Jeremiah will come to the table and work with me, as a teammate and partner, to help our teams succeed together," said Kim McHugh, a vice president at JLL who worked with Sellen for many years in her former role as western Washington's senior construction manager at Providence Health & Services. "Sellen's knowledge base and technical acumen is a huge advantage."

Two factors propelled Sellen Special Projects into reality: the great success stories that came from Shakespeare's projects, and a market that was trending increasingly toward interior renovations rather than new buildings. Given the sheer increase in the volume of work and his highly effective approach, Sellen asked him to head up a formal Special Projects group within the firm.



*"Our mission is to dispel the myth that we are strictly a 'tower crane contractor.' We want to create a space that exceeds our clients' expectations and delivers all the things they've dreamed about, all in a matter of weeks."*

- Jeremiah Shakespeare  
Director of Sellen Special Projects, Sellen

Shakespeare is driven by more than simply executing a project — he's motivated by cultivating partnerships and relationships that endure for years. This attitude is at the foundation of Special Projects and noticed by clients like McHugh.

"The group that Sellen has with Special Projects is truly engaged in making sure that projects are successful and one-on-one relationships are developed," McHugh said. "The team they recruit and retain demonstrates their desire to live that same mission of long-term relationship development. When we put those pieces together with our goals and desired outcomes as the owner, it takes that team to a new level."

## Building for Today & Tomorrow

Today, under Shakespeare's leadership, Special Projects continues to work on office and healthcare projects throughout the region. In addition, it is constantly expanding its capabilities, including



## Barry Strand

Sr. Project Manager

With Sellen Since 1988

**Fun Fact:** Barry has only had one job outside of Sellen — bussing tables at Roche Harbor when he was in high school.

Right off the bat, there are a few things you should know about Senior Project Manager Barry Strand: his work ethic is unparalleled, he's quick to smile, and he has a penchant for brightly colored polo shirts.

With 29 years at the company, Strand is a Sellen "lifer" and a core member of Sellen Special Projects, where he leads teams on office and healthcare tenant improvement projects with fast-paced schedules. He started in the field, working as a laborer during summer and winter

*"Barry is really good at what he does and finds a way to have fun no matter how busy things are. He's got a wealth of knowledge and he's a great teacher."*

- Alexis Thompson  
Post Construction Manager, Sellen

breaks while he was attending Oregon State University.

"They didn't really have internships back then," Strand said. "I worked as a laborer on some projects at Virginia Mason and experienced firsthand what the construction industry was all about."

This experience proved helpful when he returned as a project engineer, providing added credibility with the field crews that helped show him the ropes as a laborer. He continued to hone his craft for years,

playing a key role on some of Sellen's most significant projects. Today, the tables have turned, and Strand is in a position to mentor the up-and-coming engineers on the Sellen Special Projects team.

"The next wave of engineers are really excited about their work, and it's fun to find opportunities for them to learn and flourish," Strand said.

And he's got a lot to offer those young engineers. He works quickly and efficiently, applying his knowledge gained over the years to deliver new spaces in hospitals and office buildings throughout the region, and making plenty of friends along the way.

"It's really rewarding to be able to help our clients and reassure them that they're going to be taken care of," Strand said. "In Special Projects, we often work directly with the people that are going to use the space, so it's powerful to see their reactions when they see the results of our work."



PHOTO: WON MOC

really changed, even though it has grown into a big tree.”

The success of the team starts and ends with the unique, tight-knit group. Each individual is committed to helping clients create a space that exceeds all goals, regardless of the project’s size. Some have worked at Sellen for nearly four decades, while others have joined the group only recently. No matter the length of their tenure, one common thread runs throughout Special Projects: a steadfast dedication to their clients, their craft and their coworkers.

“Sellen treats their small projects the same as their large shell and core projects,” Patterson said. “Even though Sellen is a bigger company than they used to be, they haven’t lost sight of the little guy. They’ve maintained the spirit of a small contractor and everything that comes with it.”

With an agile, cohesive team reminiscent of a smaller firm, and the resources and market expertise of Sellen, Special Projects is poised for success, both now and in the future.

“We want to build projects that are just as revered and recognized as our large buildings,” Shakespeare said. “When I see our younger project managers and engineers out there working with new clients, I see the pioneers of the next wave of decades-long partnerships.” ■

**TOP:** Crews recently wrapped up work on The Polyclinic’s updated space at Northgate Plaza

**BOTTOM:** Special Projects completed a refresh of a rehearsal space for the Northwest Boychoir in August

a new post-construction service that supports clients throughout the warranty period to ensure new spaces are operating as designed.

Char Patterson, a principal at JPC Architects, has worked with Sellen on many of these projects since she started in the industry more than two decades ago.

“Our culture at JPC has always been to do whatever it takes. I see that mentality at Sellen, too,” Patterson said. “The roots haven’t



PHOTO: ANDREW POGUE

## Oscar Lilienthal

### Project Manager

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#### With Sellen Since 2014

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**Fun Fact:** Oscar spends most of his free time hiking, skiing and enjoying the outdoors. Ask him to recommend a great hike — you won’t regret it.

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Oscar Lilienthal can trace his interest in the construction industry back to an unusual place: Tijuana, Mexico.

“We took a school trip to build a house for a family. It got me immediately hooked on working on projects that impact the community,” Lilienthal said. “The work we do here at Sellen really resonates with me in that respect.”

That passion is readily apparent to everyone he meets. As a project manager, Lilienthal works with a wide variety of architects, subcontractors and owners. He relishes the unique opportunities afforded to him by working on the fast-paced projects of Sellen Special Projects.

“I can build the estimate, buy out the job, hire all the subcontractors

and manage the job through closeout, all while simultaneously working on another project,” Lilienthal said.

In his three years with Sellen, Lilienthal has worked on myriad project types, from replacing a door in a hospital to dazzling exhibit spaces, such as “The Ninety” for the Seattle Sounders. His commitment to a project is unwavering, regardless of its size.

“There really is no job too small for the right client,” Lilienthal said. “I treat a \$5,000 project with the same level of care as a \$5 million project.”

Perhaps the most striking thing about him, however, is his role as a powerful stabilizing force within Sellen Special Projects — a truly unique trait for a young project manager. He has an innate ability to project a sense of complete calm to everyone around him, no matter how hectic things are.

“Oscar’s always got a plan,” said Jeremiah Shakespeare, director of Sellen Special Projects and one of Oscar’s mentors. “He makes you feel like you can take a deep breath, and it will all be OK.”



PHOTO: WON MOC