The Weitz Company has a long and storied history. Founded in 1855, it is the oldest commercial general contractor found west of the Mississippi River. Headquartered in Des Moines, Iowa, the company descends from a small carpentry shop founded by German immigrant Charles H. Weitz in what was then Fort Des Moines.

He handed down his values and craftsmanship to four generations of his family, and today the company has 11 offices throughout the United States. Though the company is no longer family owned, having been bought in 2012 by Orascom Construction Limited, it continues to excel in a full range of Commercial building types as well as the industrial agriculture, manufacturing and heavy industrial markets.

Given the business’s strong heritage and history, it seems hard to believe Weitz waited until it was 160 years old before it opened an office in Minnesota, just one state to the north of its headquarters. In 2013, the company began construction of Trillium Woods in Plymouth, Minn., a 500,000-square-foot, award-winning continuing care retirement community.

In 2014, the company opened Weitz Professional Services (WPS) Group in the North Star state. The WPS business unit delivers design/build solutions for agricultural, feed, seed and grain processing; pet food;
food and beverage; and manufacturing customers throughout the United States.

Then, in December 2016, the company formally expanded its Minnesota presence when its commercial construction team also opened an office in Plymouth, Minn. Dave Rahe, Weitz Minnesota Executive, has been with the company since 2013 and works with his friend and fellow Minnesota Executive, Mike Zitelman, overseeing the Minnesota expansion. "It’s a great market," Rahe notes. "The quality of people here at all levels is amazing, and the market offers tremendous diversity from a client standpoint."

Following the completion of Trillium Woods in 2015, the Minnesota commercial team has completed office, manufacturing and higher education projects throughout Minnesota.

**Lean Culture**

For Rahe, who grew up in Iowa, the opportunity to grow and develop Weitz’s Minnesota operations presents a unique opportunity to build on a well-known name. And that name has been built on developing excellent relationships with its customers. "We have a saying," Rahe says. "We want to build for those that share our passion for safety, quality and lean implementation. To Build A Better Way."

Clearly, once Weitz completes a project for a client, it has an impact. Nearly 75 percent of its business is with repeat clients. "Once we have that first opportunity," Rahe says, "we often strike a pretty strong chord."

The chord that Rahe is referring to stems from Weitz's commitment to its core values and lean implementation. "We have ingrained in our team a hunger for learning and for doing things the right way," Rahe notes.

That focus on lean practices comes from a deep commitment and belief that such practices provide the most value for the client. A key piece of this philosophy is the Last Planner System ™. It is a system that eliminates waste in the planning process, but also creates a more predictable workflow by enhancing communication and collaboration.

Another key component in the company’s lean culture is the use of technology. On-demand access to real-time updates and project information elevates the quality of collaboration among project team members. Built into these practices is a commitment to quality as Weitz works collaboratively with designers, engineers and subcontractors. There is also a prescribed method of preparing, meeting and implementing mock-ups to ensure a high-quality project.

**Lean Construction Institute**

Rahe’s commitment to lean construction methods extends beyond Weitz. He is serving as the upper-midwest chair of the Lean Construction Institute (LCI). The main function of the non-profit institute is to conduct R&D into project-based production management.
in the design, engineering and construction of capital facilities. LCI has chapters around the globe.

LCI’s vision is to transform the built environment through the implementation of lean methods. The goal is to increase stakeholder satisfaction and project delivery value. LCI says this is achieved through four key strategies:

- **Demand** – Create a greater demand for lean methods by creating a collegial owner group.
- **Knowledge** – Develop and deliver standard building blocks for lean methods. This is done by increasing industry awareness by growing and enhancing the LCI Congress. This group meets once a year and is a week-long dynamic learning experience featuring deep-dive learning days and general session days. Each year a different theme is explored.
- **Value** – Establish standard metrics for value and satisfaction. This is accomplished by broadly communicating the business value of lean methods by partnering with other industry associations.
- **Capacity** – Improve a user’s capacity for learning and sharing better practices by a) increasing the rate of content development and distribution and b) leveraging the strength of the individual LCI Communities of Practice.

Being the Upper Midwest chair of the group presents a unique opportunity to not only gain knowledge but to also spread that knowledge to a vital network of trade partners. “We have really ingrained ourselves within the group as it is a tremendous shar-
Valuable Subcontractors
The many lessons to be learned from lean practices follow a two-way street for Rahe and Weitz, as there are many practices and insights to be learned from subcontractors as well. “We are very pleased with our trade partners that work in this market,” Rahe explains. “We really believe they are partners and value their insights. We draw on their expertise and innovation. We learn from them just as much as they learn from us.”

According to Rahe, the end-result is that both partners improve their processes. “Both groups get better,” Rahe notes. “It takes time and effort, but we both become a better team. As a result, our delivery is faster and more cost-effective.”

As Rahe explains, such a rigorous exchange of ideas can really benefit Weitz as well as its subcontractors and trade partners. This was the case with Parsons Electric and API Group. “Parsons and API have both been tremendous from a knowledge base,” Rahe notes. “We have started a great a journey of constantly improving and challenging each other.”

Virtual Design Construction
In an effort to continually evolve and develop efficient processes, Weitz continues to adopt new advances in pre-planning. Rahe says Weitz is focused on virtual design construction (VDC). “We’re a little bit different in how we do VDC planning,” Rahe states. “We are focused on creating more than just a pretty virtual picture, but rather making sure there is creation of value-added content through-out our VDC plan.”

Rahe says Weitz recently used VDC on the renovation of a client’s student dining facility. The biggest challenge was creating virtual content and coordinating the renovation while the facility remained in-use. The team provided a solution for this challenge by using an above-ceiling laser scan above the ceiling grid and tiles. The program had the ability to virtually scan all of the existing above ceiling elements, allowing Weitz’s team to come up with more economical solutions to potential renovation design and routing issues.

Rahe says Weitz’s extension into the Minnesota market is a natural extension of one of the company’s purpose: “Build a better way.” “We are very passionate and believe in never being complacent,” Rahe notes. “We want to be continuously improving in everything we do.”