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Schools, hospitals, museums, oh my!

By Irina Ivanova

Ambitious, \$15 billion in spending by institutions over the past five years is lauded for helping the New York City construction industry survive the severe recession as residential and commercial work slipped.



Institutions accounted for \$14.8 billion of the city's construction spending from June 2008 to May 2013.

Photo: Buck Ennis

Heavy outlays for new or expanded facilities by New York City's institutions are largely responsible for carrying the city's construction industry through the recession, the New York Building Congress announced Wednesday.

Institutions, which include schools, hospitals and cultural facilities, accounted for \$14.8 billion of New York City's construction spending from June 2008 to May 2013, the Building Congress report found.

"A big reason that the New York City construction market is alive and healthy is institutional work," said Building Congress President Richard Anderson. "Every school, every hospital, every cultural facility these days in the city has an ambitious capital program."

The biggest portion of the projects came from public elementary and secondary schools, which made up 40%, or \$5.9 billion, of institutional construction starts in the past five years. Hospital and healthcare facilities accounted for 25% (\$3.7 billion) of institutional construction spending.

The list of top projects by value over the past five years includes the Weill Cornell Biomedical Research Building (\$650 million) at East 69th Street and York Avenue, the CUNY Advanced Science Research Center (\$381 million) at St. Nicholas Avenue and West 130th Street, and the East River Science Park West Tower (\$325 million) at 430 E. 29th St.

One of the beneficiaries of such spending was Manhattan-based Sciamme Construction Co., which saw its big book of institutional work hold firm while contracts for residential and commercial work declined during the recession.

"We stayed busy pre-recession through today," said the company's president, Joseph Mizzi. "We were able to do a good bit of work in the institutional market, both educationally and in cultural projects."

About 40% of Sciamme's construction work is in the institutional sector.

Mr. Anderson of the Building Congress expects institutional construction to grow in the coming years as the overall construction market recovers.