

# Minority-owned firm gets \$13.4M contract to build S.C. arts center

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CHARLESTON, S.C. — A black-owned company has been awarded a \$13.4 million contract for work on Charleston's new performing arts center, the largest minority contract for a municipal project in the city where the Civil War began, officials announced Wednesday.

"The message is that this really is a community committed to giving emerging businesses a chance — a chance at the American dream," Charleston Mayor Joseph P. Riley Jr. said at a news conference outside the site where the \$142 million Gaillard Center is being built.

Horus Construction Co. has been awarded the \$13.4 million subcontract for masonry work on the Gaillard project. Riley said the contract is thought to be among the largest such minority contracts in state history.

South Carolina's population is about 28 percent black, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. The announcement was made as Black History Month was drawing to a close.

City officials say the center will be a world-class performing arts venue for events, including performances staged by the internationally known Spoleto Festival USA. It's one of the largest capital projects ever undertaken by the city, which was founded in 1670.

Horus has offices in Florida, North Carolina and Texas. It has worked on other projects such as the Waterfront Park and Art Museum in Tampa, a science building at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and schools in various states.

"We're excited about this project," said Jonathan Graham, the president of Horus Construction.

The work includes installing 260,000 square feet of brick, 716,000 square feet of dry wall and 57,000 square feet of dry wall ceiling

Graham said more than 100 local workers would be hired for the masonry work, giving them a chance to hone their skills and allowing the company to give back to the community.

The Charleston project also allows the company to raise its profile nationally, he said. The main contractors on the arts center, Skansa and Trident Construction, awarded the subcontract.

Riley said it wasn't just given to Horus.

"Every business had a chance to bid. They had to be the most competitive," he said.

The Associated Press left messages with the Governor's Office and the state Department of Commerce asking about the biggest minority contract in South Carolina history.

Construction on the center is expected to be complete by December of next year.

Officials have said they don't think the completion date will be delayed by the recent discovery of 37 graves from an old graveyard at one corner of the construction site.