

Felix Construction senior project manager Ryan Boyker on the job at Gilbert Water Site 20 in Gilbert, Arizona.

BUILDING INFRASTRUCTURE TO LAST

Felix Construction's culture, craft and customer-first ethos fuel sustainable success

By Suzan Chin-Taylor

In the fast-paced world of infrastructure construction, longevity and loyalty are often rare. Yet Felix Construction Company, founded in 1987 by Don and Renee Felix in Mesa, Arizona, has achieved both by doing things differently — and doing them right.

With more than 350 employees and an expanding presence in Arizona and Texas, Felix has become a premier municipal water and wastewater contractor. But what truly distinguishes the company is its unwavering focus on company culture, relationships, a higher standard for customer service and a field-first mentality — placing the expertise and insight of field teams at the center of everything they do.

As Felix Construction grew, the company was intentional in specializing in the construction and rehabilitation of municipal water and wastewater treatment facilities. Felix leaned into its niche, developing deep technical expertise in process systems, electrical integration and plant operations — all highly specific to water and wastewater.

“From the start, the Felix family has always prioritized safety, quality and a high standard of customer service,” says CEO David Giannetto. “As the company grew and transitioned to a second generation, those core values remained at the center. We weren’t chasing growth for growth’s sake or focused on profitability with the goal of selling. We wanted to do things a certain way — with pride in craftsmanship, long-term relationships and a commitment to doing things right. The goal was never to build and flip — it was to build something that would last.”

That commitment to quality and long-term thinking continues to define the company today. Felix’s earliest clients — including cities, utilities and engineers — remain part of its customer base decades later. Today, much of Felix’s work is secured through Alternative Delivery methods, earned through trust, performance and reputation — not by chasing the

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David Giannetto

lowest bid. The company is often selected for its ability to solve problems in the field, collaborate with owners and engineers, and deliver lasting solutions — not just projects that check boxes.

“One of our greatest strengths is how we solve problems,” says senior project manager JT Core. “We don’t walk away when it gets hard. We bring people together and figure it out.”

That mindset has helped Felix earn its reputation as a trusted partner, not just a contractor. Whether delivering a new-build greenfield facility or retrofitting aging infrastructure within tight urban corridors, the team approaches each challenge with hands-on accountability and technical confidence.

Strategic advantage

A defining characteristic of Felix’s approach is its strong in-house capability. Rather than rely on subcontractors for every trade, the company maintains internal crews skilled in civil, structural concrete, process piping, mechanical, electrical and process instrumentation and controls work. This model gives Felix greater control over quality, safety and schedule — while allowing the field team to fully understand and own the work.

“We don’t hire other people to do the hard stuff — we do it ourselves,” says Core. “Our people know the expectations and they take real pride in what they build. Because Felix self-performs so much of the work, we maintain a higher level of control over quality and schedule. We’re not dependent on an over-

stretched subcontractor pool. It’s a completely different mindset when you’re not just managing other people’s work — you’re responsible for delivering it yourself.”

Felix’s UL-508A certified control panel shop, located at the corporate office in Phoenix, is another example of this commitment. The shop designs and fabricates control panels for water and wastewater systems in-house, giving the company full control over one of the most complex and often problematic components of municipal infrastructure.

“20 years ago, we saw an opportunity to take control of the process and raise the standard,” says Giannetto. “By bringing electrical and controls work in-house, we created a more collaborative, accountable environment and eliminated the classic blame game that often occurs during startup and commissioning.”

The result? Fewer change orders, faster startups and higher long-term reliability for clients. The customers get a fully tailored control panel designed for their needs and control preferences. Felix’s electrical and controls team collaborates directly with engineers during design, coordinates installation in the field, and commissions systems without the delays that can plague the traditional low-bid delivery model.

Employee ownership

In February 2025, Felix Construction made a



PROFILE: Felix Construction Company

FOUNDED:
1987

HEADQUARTERS:
Phoenix, Arizona

EMPLOYEES:
350-plus

CORE SERVICES:
Water and wastewater facility construction, electrical systems, instrumentation and controls, rehabilitation and retrofit, job order contracting, industrial pretreatment

SERVICE AREA:
Arizona and Texas

WEBSITE:
felixconstruction.com

Felix Construction is headquartered in Phoenix, Arizona.



defining move for its suture: It transitioned to an Employee Stock Ownership Plan. With this change, 100% of the company is now owned by its employees.

"We could've sold to a private equity firm or a national conglomerate. But that's not who we are," says Giannetto. "Felix was built on relationships. It was built to last. The ESOP lets us stay true to that. And most importantly, directly rewards the people who are responsible for the success of the company."

The decision wasn't made lightly. According to Giannetto and team members like Michelle Maki, who heads up marketing, the ESOP was driven by two core goals: Reward the team that built the company and protect the unique culture that defines it.

"It was about legacy," Maki says. "Don and Renee made the first transition of ownership by choosing Kevin Felix, Joel Felix, Matt Phillips and David Giannetto because they knew they were the right people to preserve the company and its culture. As these four prepared for the next ownership transition, they saw the ESOP as the best way to protect that same culture while supporting continued growth. They wanted to give something back to the people who helped build this company. The ESOP makes that possible."

Interns to leaders

Felix's commitment to its people doesn't stop with ownership. One of the company's core strengths is how it cultivates talent from within. The team often jokes that they "build through the draft, not free

agency" — meaning they develop leaders internally rather than hiring from competitors.

"We don't poach superintendents from other companies. We create them," says Core.

Each summer, Felix hosts a large group of interns — many of whom rotate through departments such as project management, field operations, estimating and administration. These internships aren't busy-work; they're real-world opportunities to contribute and learn.

"We had 15 interns this past summer," says Maki. "A big percentage of our current rising stars at all levels of leadership throughout the company came through those internships or apprenticeship

programs."

When interns return after graduation or new hires come on board, they're paired with experienced mentors. This isn't a symbolic gesture — it's a structured, intentional program that supports skill-building, communication and career growth.

"I had mentors early on who changed the course of my career," says senior project manager Ryan Boyker. "Now it's my turn to pay that forward."

The result is a workforce that's technically sharp, deeply committed and aligned with Felix's values.

"Culture doesn't scale unless you're intentional," says Core. "We've built a framework that keeps us aligned as our organizational chart gets bigger."

Problem solvers

While the construction industry often focuses on speed and cost, Felix has built its reputation on something different: solving the tough problems others avoid.

That mindset has led to memorable project wins — and even more meaningful client trust. When a deep well casing failed unexpectedly, 500 feet below ground, the Felix team didn't delay. They worked with specialty subcontractors to drill a new well 40 feet away, coordinated a rapid response and stayed on schedule without compromising safety or quality.

"Nobody panicked," recalls Boyker. "We analyzed, we acted and we delivered."

On another job, the team was tasked with installing a 96-inch manhole over a live 56-inch sewer main in the middle of an urban corridor, just days before a major stadium event. With a 14-day window, Felix used 3D modeling, temporary bypass systems and custom shoring to complete the work safely and on time.

"It was one of those jobs where everything had

Ryan Boyker looks at a Felix Construction nitrate analyzer panel at Gilbert Water Site 20.



to go right,” says Core. “And it did, because we plan, we communicate and we execute.”

These aren’t exceptions — they’re part of a pattern. Felix is frequently called upon when timelines are tight, conditions are complex, or design plans are missing key constructability elements. The company’s reputation for delivering under pressure is a direct result of its field-first culture and highly capable crews.

“We don’t just execute the plans,” says Boyker. “We help improve them.”

That collaborative, solution-oriented mindset is why municipalities, developers and private utilities come back to Felix again and again. It’s especially evident in their strong expertise with Job Order Contracting, which makes up about 40% of their annual volume. Job Order Contracting is a project delivery method that allows public agencies to complete a series of repair and maintenance projects quickly through pre-priced, competitively awarded contracts.

“We’ve been doing JOC work for over 20 years,” says Giannetto. “It’s a delivery method that suits our strengths — speed, trust, flexibility.”

Strategic expansion

Felix Construction’s entry into Texas wasn’t opportunistic — it was intentional. After building a trusted name across Arizona, leadership saw a natural opportunity to expand into the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex.

“We weren’t just chasing growth,” says Giannetto. “We were looking for markets where our values and approach would resonate.”

Texas checked all the boxes: a booming population, aging infrastructure and a growing need for high-quality water and wastewater contractors. The state’s procurement models, which include all types of alternative delivery methods, also aligned with Felix’s proven strengths.

But unlike firms that enter new markets aggressively, Felix took a slow, deliberate path. The company spent time developing relationships with local agencies, understanding procurement practices and hiring experienced local professionals — many of whom were already familiar with Felix’s reputation.

Now that the company is an ESOP, Felix feels that expansion into other markets throughout the country, particularly in the Southwest, is very likely over the next decade.

“Our goal isn’t to be in every state,” says Giannetto. “It’s to be great where we are — and only grow where we can maintain our standards.”

Real results

Despite working in a sector that many see as traditional or slow to change, Felix Construction is lever-

aging technology to improve outcomes and build smarter.

“3D modeling and digital coordination are no longer just for high-rise buildings,” says Boyker. “They’re helping us build better treatment plants, too.”

Felix has integrated Building Information Modeling into its preconstruction workflows. These virtual models are used to coordinate complex pipe layouts, identify structural clashes and ensure equipment access before crews hit the field. The results:

“We’re doing the real work of making infrastructure last — and making it smarter.”

JT Core

fewer delays, better communication and streamlined project delivery.

“It’s about eliminating surprises,” says Giannetto.



Kris Angel works on an RTU in the Felix Construction control panel shop.



“When you model a facility digitally before you build it physically, you save time, money and frustration.”

Felix field teams are also equipped with mobile tablets to access plans, coordinate logistics, and submit real-time reports. Office teams use scheduling software, procurement dashboards and integrated controls to keep everything on track. But for Felix, technology is never about flash — it’s about functionality.

“It’s not about shiny software,” says Boyker. “It’s about choosing the right tools that make us more responsive, more consistent and more accountable.”

This pragmatic approach ensures that digital inno-

vation enhances — not replaces — the hands-on knowledge of experienced crews. Technology supports the mission but never overshadows the values that drive it.

The next 50 years

As climate extremes, resource scarcity and urban growth continue to strain public infrastructure, Felix Construction is helping cities think long-term. From designing energy-efficient systems to integrating adaptive features for extreme weather, Felix builds with durability and flexibility in mind.

Felix collaborates with engineering teams and operators to ensure that plants are designed not only for today’s flows, but for tomorrow’s realities. Features like backup generators, corrosion-resistant materials and structural allowances for future expansion are increasingly part of standard project scopes.

“We’re not just building for compliance — we’re building for the future,” says Giannetto.

The company also pays close attention to retrofit challenges where old and new systems must function seamlessly. Constructability is a major focus, and designs are reviewed with an eye toward long-term operation and maintenance.

“Will the equipment be accessible? Can it be maintained easily? Will it keep up with future capacity demands? “Those are the questions we’re asking up front,” Boyker says.

One recent project involved a phased plant expansion with stub-outs and foundations installed for future modules, allowing the client to add capacity years down the line without major demolition. This kind of foresight reflects Felix’s broader philosophy: Make the investment count, for both present and future stakeholders.

“We’re not chasing the latest green buzzwords,” adds Core. “We’re doing the real work of making infrastructure last — and making it smarter.”

Built on trust

With employee ownership now in place, a strategic expansion plan underway, and a solid backlog of work across two states, Felix Construction is entering a new era. But the company’s core mission remains the same.

“We’re not going to be everything to everyone,” says Giannetto. “We’re going to stay great at what we do and keep building a company people are proud to be part of.”

That pride is evident, from the field crews setting forms in 115-degree heat, to the office teams coordinating schedules and sourcing equipment, to the interns who choose to return summer after summer. It’s a pride rooted not in ego, but in craft, consistency and care.

“We’ve had customers for 25 years,” says Core. “That’s not normal in this business. But it’s normal for us.”

As the industry grapples with workforce shortages, aging infrastructure, and shifting delivery models, Felix stands out as a contractor that’s prepared — not just with tools and talent, but with values that guide every decision.

“We build infrastructure, but we’re really building trust,” says Maki. “With our clients, with our team, and with our communities.” ♦

MEET DUCTILE – FELIX’S FAVORITE MASCOT

If you spend any time around Felix Construction, you’ll likely spot a small rubber duck — Ductile — that has become more than a novelty. He’s a symbol of culture, camaraderie and creative thinking at a company known for doing serious work with a human touch.

The tradition began with Matt Phillips, head of field operations, who started handing out rubber ducks at community events like the Phoenix Children’s “Big Dig for Kids.” Phillips even showed up in a duck costume, embodying the kind of out-of-the-box thinking that makes Felix stand out. What started as a fun gesture for kids quickly caught on with the internal team.

“Some people thought it was silly at first,” recalls Michelle Maki. “But it stuck — people loved it.”

The duck was soon dubbed Ductile, a clever nod to ductile iron pipe, a material

often used in the field. He began appearing at safety meetings, on project sites, in internal presentations, and all over company communications. Photos of Ductile posed with crews or perched on machinery became a regular sight.

What started as a whimsical idea is now a major part of Felix’s presence at industry trade shows and outreach events. Attendees line up for a chance to get a Ductile rubber duck or sticker, and the character has helped cement the company’s brand in a crowded marketplace.

“He’s a great icebreaker,” says Ryan Boyker. “You’d be amazed how something that simple creates connection. It reminds people who we are.”

For a company built on infrastructure and integrity, Ductile represents a lighter side—a reminder that humor and humanity are part of the blueprint, too.