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RACING THE CLOCK

Local steel firm rushes to beat Siberian winter

Fabricators making trusses for donated indoor soccer facility

By [Rick Cundiff](#)
Star-Banner

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OCALA - As Tropical Storm Fay dropped torrents of rain Friday on Ocala, Bernie Coyle was worried about ice.



Jannet Walsh/Star-Banner

Bernie Coyle, of American Spaceframe Fabricators International, shows some of the special trusses that are being prepared for shipment to Siberia.

Coyle, the CEO of Ocala-based American Spaceframe Fabricators International, needs to get steel trusses for a fabric building shipped to Siberia soon.

The steel needs to get to Norilsk, Russia by October, Coyle said. "The port freezes. Once the port freezes, you gotta wait 'til the summer thaw," he said.

ASFI is shipping the fabric-framed structure to the second-largest city north of the Arctic Circle. Once it gets

there, the building will be assembled into an indoor soccer facility for the people of Norilsk.

"It's a very sophisticated building, because it will support about 400 kilograms (approximately 881 pounds) of snow load per square meter," said Raouf Jafiarov, president of L.A.R.T. Industrial Resources, the Canadian-Russian engineering firm for the project.

The sports arena is a gift to the city of Norilsk from MMC Norilsk Nickel. The mining company is the world's largest producer of nickel and palladium.

The \$25 million project offered a complex challenge to ASFI. Both the steel trusses and the fabric covering must be able to withstand temperatures as low as -58 degrees Celsius (-72 degrees Fahrenheit), winds up to 100 mph, and up to 400 inches of snow a year.

"The steel, we had to order a custom alloy, and buy the entire batch and have it custom rolled," Coyle said.

The tensioned-fabric structure actually works better than a traditional building would for the same purpose, Coyle said.

"If you want to have a soccer field, you don't want to have big steel columns that the ball's going to bounce off of," he said.

The project has been in the works for nearly three years, starting before ASFI moved from Crystal River to Ocala last year.

"A lot of that was the engineering challenge," said ASFI architectural sales vice president Timothy Nee.

The arched shape of the structure confounded some Russian engineers, Coyle said.

"Engineers, they deal with buildings. They're trained on rectangles. These structures are curves," he said. "Whenever we deal with engineers who are not accustomed to dealing with curves, it's a daunting challenge."

The language barrier added another challenge, as did Russian law. Unlike in the United States, Russian engineers can be charged with a crime if disaster strikes.

"In Russia, if you're the engineer who signed off on that building that collapsed, then you're criminally liable," said ASFI vice president of business development Chris Longley. "Quite literally, they would challenge us on every single truss."

Norilsk has other challenges. The city of 134,000 residents is accessible only by sea or air, a four-hour jet flight from Moscow. The Blacksmith Institute, a U.S.-based environmental organization has named it one of the world's 10 most polluted cities for each of the past two years.

The new soccer facility, which is expected to be completed next year, will give Norilsk parents some welcome relief, Coyle said. Marion County families whose children were stuck in the house last week because of the rain are a good example, he said.

"Can you imagine all the people here in Marion County going crazy because they can't get the kids out to burn up the energy?" he asked. "That's the main purpose of this, to get the kids out so they can burn up that energy."

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