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All shiny and new: Dome's roof finished Concentration will now shift inside

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By Jeff Duncan

Workers applied the final coat of white urethane sealant to the roof of the Superdome on Wednesday, completing what officials are calling the largest roof job in American construction history.

Now the focus of the multi-phase renovation heads inside the 30-year-old stadium, where hundreds of contractors are busy trying to complete jobs in time for the building's nationally televised unveiling Sept. 25 when the Saints host the Atlanta Falcons on "Monday Night Football."

"So far, so good," said Doug Thornton, the regional vice president of SMG, the company that manages the Dome. "We couldn't be more pleased with the way things went on the roof." The job required 120 roofers working round the clock since March 1 to finish. When it was done, workers had replaced 10,463 pieces of galvanized metal decking and sprayed 500,000 gallons of polyurethane foam sealant to the 9.7-acre surface.

Tom Keller, project manager for Brazos Urethane, Inc., said Wednesday's work completed a job that began more than nine months ago for his College Station, Texas-based company. Brazos was the only one of six contractors that evaluated the job to submit a bid. The final price tag: \$32.5 million.

"My boss called me last September and asked me if I was watching CNN," Keller said. "I told him I was. He said, 'That's our job.'"

"We've been planning this job since mid-October, and our plan worked. We are one happy group."

A few mechanical aspects of the project remain before the job is completely finished. Workers will replace the 12 air vents at the top and repair the metal edge flashing around the perimeter of the roof in the next few weeks, Keller said.

"It's like a big playground up there," Keller said. "I've been driving past this building since I was 18 years old, saying to myself, someday I'm gonna play up there."

Interior work continues in nearly every level of the Dome. Painting and ceiling work in the 137 luxury suites is moving at an accelerated pace. Finish work, including cabinets, countertops and floor covering, will not be completed until after the 2006 football season. However, new leather chairs will be installed in the seating areas in front of the suites.

Thornton said labor and material costs on the suite renovations have been higher than expected and could force his team to re-scope the refurbishment of the clubrooms. He said the job will not exceed the projected \$185.4 million price tag.

Five other projects also are on track: replacement of 14,000 seats in the club, plaza and terrace levels that were damaged during the storm; installation of a new epoxy flooring system in the ramps and concourses; remodeling of the 38 permanent concession stands; installation of a new technology infrastructure; and the new video board-scoreboard-LED ribbon board system.

"We're confident the building is going to be ready for football by Sept. 25, but the project is far from over," Thornton said. "We've got a long way to go."

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