

February 2026 Vol. 47 • No. 02 • \$4.00



CAM

M A G A Z I N E

"THE VOICE OF THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY"

CRANES/LIFTING EQUIPMENT

**Cranes in Motion: Lifting Michigan's
Infrastructure Forward**

**GM's New Marquee Sign Rises
Above Detroit**

**Heavy Lifts and Construction
Planning at MSU's Farm Lane Bridge**

CONSTRUCTION TECHNOLOGY

**Leveraging Drone Technology for
Infrastructure Condition Assessments**

METALS/STEEL

**Prefab Steel Powers Michigan's
Industrial Momentum**

**Forging Ahead: Michigan-Based
Metal Solutions Company
Expands Headquarters**



PREFAB STEEL POWERS MICHIGAN'S INDUSTRIAL MOMENTUM

By Mike Scott

Prefab and modular steel construction is no longer a niche solution in Michigan's industrial sector—it has become a strategic advantage. As demand accelerates for data centers, battery plants, distribution hubs, and complex infrastructure projects, fabricators and contractors across the state are increasingly turning to off-site steel fabrication and modular assembly to control costs, overcome labor shortages, and keep projects on schedule. From massive pipe modules to fully engineered mezzanines, steel-driven prefabrication is reshaping how Michigan builds at industrial scale.

Everything that Ideal Contracting in Detroit and Ann Arbor works on is related to prefab construction, according to Pat Bell, Vice President of the firm's Steel Group. "We erect it with a crane and build it," he explained.

Michigan currently has 64 data centers, according to the Data Center Map database maintained by Cleanview, with more in development. One high-profile project in Michigan is a proposed \$7 billion, 2.2-million-square-foot data center in Saline Township, backed by DTE Energy for OpenAI—the company behind ChatGPT—and Oracle. Known as Project Stargate, the facility would support artificial intelligence programs through OpenAI's Stargate platform.

This rapid expansion in data centers is prompting major utility companies to prepare for a corresponding increase in energy demand. Michigan's two largest electric utilities, Consumers Energy Company and DTE Electric Company, "have signaled significant potential growth in data center operations in the coming years," according to a December 10, 2025, article on JD Supra.

Beyond data centers, Michigan's industrial sector as a whole is also seeing strong development momentum. A Michigan 2024 Industrial Construction Report released by online data provider Industrial Sales Leads tracked 82 new distribution and warehouse projects in Michigan in 2024, with some of those projects continuing into 2025.

Distribution centers and logistics hubs often benefit from the use of prefabricated steel components and modular office or support spaces because they can be integrated efficiently and at a reasonable cost into warehouse shells.



A simple steel frame structure with pipe modules would otherwise be a near-impossible task without prefabrication. Some of the pipes and steel beams can weigh 50 to 60 tons. As a result, many heavy industrial clients turn to Ideal Contracting and other firms that specialize in prefabricated steel structures.

"Safety, speed, and price are what matter," Bell said when asked why this type of construction is popular. He confirmed that prefab construction is commonly used for industrial warehouses, battery plants, and data centers. "My clients want as much work done offsite in a controlled environment as possible," he explained.

Ideal Contracting and Bell are under strict NDAs with multiple data centers and cannot provide comment or photos related to them.



Pipe racks are installed for a manufacturing facility in Michigan.
Photo courtesy of Ideal Contracting

The Case for Modular Prefabrication in Michigan

Michigan's Premanufactured Units Program allows off-site manufactured building components and complete buildings to be certified before installation, ensuring compliance with state building codes when properly approved, according to the Michigan Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs (LARA).

Modular construction in Michigan follows the same building code requirements as site-built structures. Many statewide construction professionals work with International Code Council (ICC) standards for design, inspection, and compliance.

The question of the reliability of these structures is partially answered by the fact that pre-engineered metal building (PEMB) manufacturers generally offer extended warranties on structural integrity and finishes ranging from 20 to 50 years.

Michigan's four seasons make modular and prefabricated construction especially practical. Heavy winter snow and year-round wind gusts favor pre-engineered metal buildings (PEMBs), volumetric modules, chassis assemblies, and other steel-driven prefab components over traditional methods.

"With prefabrication, you get cheaper labor in controlled

environments, often in rural areas where labor is even harder to find," Bell said. "There are no rain or snow days either since assembly is handled offline and indoors." Cold-weather welding, temporary enclosures, and winter safety measures can drag down traditional builds—challenges prefab sidesteps entirely.

Steel and Other Built-in Efficiencies

Steel represented the largest revenue share in U.S. modular construction, accounting for about 43 percent of the modular market by revenue in 2023, according to Vision Research Reports. Steel plays a role in nearly all prefabricated construction projects, Bell said, noting that steel designs are constantly changing and offer more versatility than concrete. "Steel allows us to change modularization on the go," he explained.

For example, large pipe racks would need to be built piece by piece if prefabrication were not possible, a process that could take months or even years, depending on the size of the building. That time element is critical for construction managers and clients looking for solutions on compressed timelines, especially as contractors continue to struggle to find qualified labor.

"Most prefab construction projects are hybrid,



Double shaft crane columns for Nucor in Gallatin, Tennessee.
Photo courtesy of Ideal Contracting

combining site-built and prefabricated components,” Bell said. While interest in prefab is growing, the process itself closely resembles modularization methods that have been used for more than a century.

These projects require heavy welding

and cutting, which, if done onsite, would significantly slow completion and increase costs. Bell said that bringing ironworkers onsite to handle such responsibilities without prefabrication could lengthen timelines by nearly tenfold. Robotics can complete much of that work more efficiently and often at a higher quality in fabrication shops. Bell compared modular prefabrication to building a vehicle on an assembly line. “Work is getting done whether it rains or snows,” he said. From a safety standpoint, “every man-hour I save makes it a safer job.”

Advanced Coordination Is Critical

While the time and cost benefits are clear, they only materialize if upfront coordination aligns with the project’s goals. That coordination includes designing steel components, pipe connections, and assemblies in advance. One example is pedestrian bridges, where rails, painted decks, and components can be assembled ahead of time and installed with a “mega crane” in a single day.

Reach Your Target Audience!

CAM
MAGAZINE

For Advertising Information Call
248-972-1108
or email ebarren@BuildwithCAM.com

CAM Magazine is a publication of the Construction Association of Michigan.



Ductwork for Jim Bridger Power Plant in Point of Rocks, Wyoming.
Photo courtesy of Ideal Contracting

Ideal Contracting has six pedestrian bridges planned for 2026. Without modular prefab construction, the roads beneath those bridges could be closed for weeks or months. With modularization, onsite work may be completed in a day or two. “To do that, we need a contractor early on to understand what we’re trying to do and modularize it,” Bell explained. “That planning and coordination is what takes the most time.”

Another critical factor is reliable contractor partnerships. Bell cited a recent project that required an 18-foot-wide beam shipped between Wisconsin and Tennessee that involved Ideal’s partner Merrill Steel Inc. “My partner figured out how to get it done,” Bell said. “I have shops that build the largest steel beams in the world and partners with trucking and shipping relationships you can’t find anywhere else. You need those kinds of partners to get things done.”

Customized Mezzanines: A Versatile Choice

Beyond large-scale industrial facilities, prefab steel is also reshaping interior industrial infrastructure. While prefab steel mezzanine construction remains a popular option for many companies and builders, customized versions deliver the same quality with greater versatility, unique engineering insight, and hands-on design guidance—all at competitive prices and often faster timelines, said Michael Detty, Senior Operations Manager for Lee Industrial Contracting in Pontiac.

Detty explained that there is a large market of prefab mezzanine options that customers can buy “out of the box.” But customized options can efficiently address a variety of features, ranging from high load ratings and customized numbers of columns to other building specifics that would otherwise be difficult to secure. Like other custom providers, Lee employs in-house engineering professionals who provide custom design and handle operational needs. This is particularly helpful because the assembly often comes in “a million pieces.”

“Our work includes design and full installation,” Detty said. “It’s more about the facility’s needs and looking at things like equipment and production restraints.”

Building on that tailored approach, “a customized steel mezzanine allows contractors to focus on a customer’s unique design requirements and constraints to ensure the best solution,” Detty said. Once a customer discusses their needs, receives an estimate, and approves the price, the in-house engineering team reviews the project to identify additional operational improvements and potential time and cost savings.

Some customers approach Lee with the assumption that a customized steel mezzanine proposal will be more expensive, but that is not always the case. “We can get better control of the schedule of the project with a customized plan,” Detty said. “We can beat their expected timing 99 percent of the time. Customized doesn’t mean more expensive. Customers are often surprised at how affordable it can be. It can be customized to save the customer money.”



YOUR VISION. OUR PEOPLE. PROUDLY BUILDING TOGETHER.

Ideal Contracting’s Steel Group is a nationally recognized steel erection partner serving clients across diverse and rapidly evolving markets — including mission-critical data centers, automotive facilities, and large-scale manufacturing projects.

As a trusted partner in Michigan and across the U.S., we bring a safety-driven, highly collaborative approach to every project. Our team delivers with precision, speed, and an unwavering commitment to safety, ensuring first-rate results on the industry’s most complex and demanding structures.



www.idealcontracting.com

“Typical mezzanine projects face a variety of challenges, including the need to elevate secondary electrical options, incorporate air tanks, and create elevated floor space,” Detty said. As a custom provider, Lee maintains a broad inventory of materials to adapt quickly to customer needs. While some specialized materials may not always be immediately available, the supply chain is generally flexible—allowing projects to be completed efficiently. “Steel mills and supply chains aren’t typically carrying a lot of inventory, but we have relationships all around the world,” Detty said.

Besides time and meeting specific needs, another advantage of a customized mezzanine process is that a contractor like Lee can identify specific recommendations that customers without a construction background, such as plant managers, may not anticipate. “We can ask what you want to load or show where a better place may be for a ladder,” Detty said. “We can fabricate pallet-loading gates. We can build in fall restraint systems that are certified by professional engineers and rated for fall protection, which adds a safety element.”

Demand for customized steel mezzanines remains strong. “It’s a rare day when we aren’t working on one or more of these projects,” Detty explained. Most of Lee’s clients are industrial, often Tier 1 automotive suppliers committed to expanding operational space within a confined footprint, though the company occasionally takes on residential projects as well.

“Custom doesn’t mean it costs more, and we work to complete a project within a budget,” Detty said. “It is designed to do exactly what the mezzanine is intended to do.”

From Advantage to Expectation

As Michigan’s industrial construction pipeline continues to expand, prefabricated and modular steel solutions are proving to be less about convenience and more about necessity. Labor constraints, compressed timelines, weather challenges, and increasingly complex building requirements have pushed contractors and owners to rethink traditional construction models.

Whether erecting massive data centers, installing pedestrian bridges over active roadways, or creating additional production space through customized mezzanines, the success of prefabrication hinges on early planning, engineering coordination, and trusted partnerships across the supply chain. While the methods themselves are not new, advances in design, fabrication, and logistics have elevated modular steel construction into a critical tool for delivering large-scale projects safely, efficiently, and predictably.

In an environment where speed, safety, and flexibility define competitiveness, Michigan’s continued industrial momentum is increasingly being built—piece by piece—long before construction ever reaches the jobsite. 



OAKLAND
METAL SALES INC

Copper

- ▶ Cold Rolled Copper Sheet and Coil in 12oz-.125
- ▶ Lead Coat, 16 & 20oz
- ▶ Freedom Gray Z-T Alloy Coated Copper, 16 & 20oz
- ▶ Pre-Patinated Copper
- ▶ Copper Bar

Aluminum

- ▶ Mill Finish .025-.125
- ▶ Anodized Aluminum .032-.125
- ▶ Kynar 500®/Hylar 5000® Pre-Finished Sheets .032-.063

Stainless Steel

- ▶ 10ga-28ga Sheets 2B & #4 Finishes

Kynar 500®/Hylar 5000® Pre-Finished Galvanized Steel Sheets

- ▶ Roofing and Wall Systems in Many Profiles from Different Manufacturers

Galvanized, Galvalume, Bonderized Steel Sheets

Zinc Sheet & Coil

Lead Sheets

Gutter Systems

- ▶ Copper: American & European Styles
- ▶ Zinc
- ▶ Pre-Finished Steel & Aluminum

Custom Fabricated Brake Metal

Woodgrain Extruded Aluminum Panels

Additional Stock Items

- ▶ Snow Guards
- ▶ Solder-Flux-Irons
- ▶ Copper & Stainless Steel Nails - Driven & Collated

**CONTACT US TODAY
FOR ALL YOUR METAL NEEDS!**

WWW.OAKLANDMETALSALES.COM

PHONE: (248) 377-8847

FAX: (248) 377-4196

EMAIL: info@oaklandmetalsales.com

Family Owned & Operated Since 1984