In some instances, such as school building projects, TLT must work with incomplete architectural plans and school building committees comprised of volunteers, "people who don't understand what it takes to get a job done," he said.

Tarbell said the firm cannot be expected to pay the costs of work that needs to be done— which isn't outlined in architectural plans.

"We can't afford to absorb things that aren't in the plans and specifications," Tarbell said. "We don't like those disputes any more than anyone else. But we can't absorb those costs.

Specializing in public projects, Tarbell noted the firm is "always under the spotlight." "Architects should be held to the same standards as contractors. But they are not," he said.

A company of 100 employees, the firm averages at least 10 multi-million dollar building projects in the state each year, according to Tarbell.

Found in Winthrop, 21-year-old TLT later moved to Peabody. Outgrowing office space there, the contractor moved to Lynn and then Wakefield.

"We have finally bought a building in Wakefield that can absorb expansion," Tarbell said, during a telephone interview last week.

Locally, TLT's work has included building projects at the Pine Grove School in Rowley, Newbury Elementary School, several projects in Georgetown and Salem, according to information provided by TLT and recent newspaper clippings.

In Gloucester, the firm is also doing $28 million worth of renovations at the city's high school. And in Methuen, TLT is renovating and putting an addition on the Marsh School, a task which carried a $15 million price tag.

In late January, TLT was awarded a $28 million building project at Brookline High School.

The firm also manages to step beyond the school building area.

In 1994 and 1995, TLT was awarded over $18 million worth of work at Taunton State Hospital, according to DCFO records. In January 1995, TLT also landed a $10 million expansion project at Roxbury District Court which involved an 8,000-square-foot addition onto the front of an existing court house there.

There's also TLT's work at the Suffolk County Courthouse.

In Newbury, officials were frustrated when TLT missed a major deadline—promising to finish a $14 million renovation and addition project by late December last year.

While nearing the finish line, the project has yet to be completed.

In Gloucester and Georgetown, TLT's presence has coincided with air quality problems. Problems in Gloucester led to an evacuation at one point. A Georgetown student discovered a bag of asbestos, a hazardous substance, draped over a locker last year.

And one year ago, the federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration fined TLT $114,600, in part for failing to protect scaffolding erected at Salem State College the previous summer.

A construction worker suffered a broken leg after falling from the staging in August 1995. An 18-year-old Salem man later committed suicide by jumping from the top of the scaffolding.

TLT has made headlines. But Tarbell stressed that doesn't always mean the problems were the firm's fault.

"It's important you understand the contractor should be heard as well," he said.