COMMERCIAL CONTRACTORS ARE also hopeful that Louisiana's fiscal posture improves, for the sake of state-funded projects. "The capital outlay budget has been reduced to a trickle," says Lenny Lemoine, executive vice president of the Lemoine Co. Inc. in Lafayette. "I think a great deal of emphasis will have to be placed on facilities that have not been maintained."

Naquin points to a report compiled by Louisiana university chancellors which suggests that $200 million is necessary just to repair existing facilities at higher education institutions in the state. New construction does not even figure into this estimate. "If the state would make a commitment to higher education, that would help," Naquin says.

Lemoine doesn't expect this to happen immediately. He expects that in the next three or four years, the state "will be able to cure deficit problems and spend money on state buildings." In the meantime, the Lemoine Co. has stayed competitive by tackling projects both in and outside of Acadiana, and in some cases, beyond Louisiana.

The company, as part of a joint venture, recently completed the Winn Parish prison facility, and is currently working on a wastewater treatment plant in Dallas and a hospital in Galveston.

"We felt we had to do that," says Lemoine. "It's no fun. It's competitive. Don't get me wrong. It's not quite as drastic as the market is here." He thinks a full recovery will not be apparent for several years to come. "We really don't see any great disparity between what exists today and the market of the past three or four years," he says.

Everyone agrees that the construction boom of the early '80s will not likely be duplicated in the foreseeable future. "I don't think we will see the . . . building that we saw," says Lemoine. "It's certainly nowhere near the market it was then."

"We think that 1990 will see a couple of blips on the scene with a couple of retail projects. All in all, we don't see it being any better or significantly worse than '88 or '89," Lemoine says.

While Billeaud doesn't anticipate any bonanzas on the horizon either, he is much more comfortable with today's construction climate than that of the past. "I don't think we'll have a large surge of construction like in the early '80s, but we'll see steady improvement."