SHAWN BURNUM
2018 Chairman of the Board
The Builders’ Association
Shawn Burnum, 2018 Chairman of The Builders’ Association, Seeks to Be a ‘Voice for All Members’

Shawn Burnum, The Builders’ Association’s 2018 Chairman, joined the board in 2015 and became an officer in 2016. He has served on The Builders’ Association’s General Labor Committee since 2014, and was on the board of The Builders’ Association’s sister organization, the Kansas City Chapter, AGC, from 2012 to 2014. Shawn is Division Manager of PCI (Performance Contracting Inc.), a commercial specialty construction firm providing a variety of interior, insulation and specialty services. PCI is also the largest subsidiary of Performance Contracting Group (PCG). His office is in Grandview, Missouri.

He is on the national board of the Association of the Wall and Ceiling Industry (AWCI), an organization he calls “a pillar of the drywall industry.” He is also on the national board of the Signatory Wall and Ceiling Contractors Alliance (SWACCA), and is acting President of SWACCA’s Kansas City Chapter, which was formed in 2016. Additionally, Shawn is past president (2011-2012) of the Ceilings & Interior Systems Construction Association (CISCA).

A graduate of Pittsburg State University, Shawn earned his Bachelor of Science degree in Construction Management magna cum laude in 1994. He received a Master’s in Organizational Management at the University of Phoenix’s Denver, Colorado, campus in 2001.

GOALS AS CHAIRMAN

Shawn stated that as chairman, he would like to be “a voice for all our members.” He added, “What makes The Builders’ Association so important to me and to our industry has to do with the team. It’s about our industry being bigger than one person, one company, or one idea.

“The Builders’ Association makes it extremely easy to get involved because its members are fun to be around. The Builders’ is very well managed with Don Greenwell as president, and it really shows when you walk in the room at a Builders’ event. I’ve been in other cities where you walk in the room and it just feels awkward, but at Builders’ events I feel at home. I truly enjoy seeing people there, including competitors I don’t get to see very often.

“I hope members will see the Builders’ as an opportunity for them to get involved with people who are passionate about the industry and want to move it forward, as opposed to sitting on the sidelines. That’s why I’m personally so willing to devote my time to the organization.

“I think the strategic input that went into the 2020 Vision Plan will give us a lot of positive momentum, especially with the progress we made at the Builders’ board retreat last November,” continued Shawn. “My hope is that we can take that positive input and turn it into tangible results.

“One thing I would emphasize is the importance of member companies, and perhaps especially the bigger companies, having more than one person who is involved with the Builders’. I think it’s important to have a conversation around getting more middle managers to see the value in participating, whether it’s a matter of their being allowed by their companies to participate or us doing more to extend an invitation.”

ROOTS IN CONSTRUCTION

Shawn grew up in Joplin. He traced his roots in construction to age 12, when his mother married a contractor, Larry Thomas. “My stepdad did residential construction and developed subdivisions,” he recalled. “I helped him build homes, doing things like framing, trim carpentry, and setting doors, and construction got in my blood. When I was in high school, I told him I wanted to go to Pitt State for a Construction Management degree. He knew first-hand that construction was a demanding career involving lots of hours, but he also knew it was my passion and was very supportive.”

Shawn was driven. “During my senior year in high school, I went to school half a day, literally changed clothes in my truck, went to the jobsite, went back home to shower, and then went to night school at Missouri Southern. My parents owned 35 rentals at that time, so when one of them needed fixing up, I helped out.”

He is a fraternal twin. “I’m three minutes older than my sister, so I can never let her live it down that I’m the older, much wiser brother,” he smiled. “When my stepdad married my mom,” he continued, “he married her children too. He actually brought my twin sister and me to the altar and said, ‘I’m marrying these two as well. They’re part of my family, they stand right here.’ Even though I was only 12 at the time, he treated me with respect. When I was 16 he started calling me ‘Mr. Burnum.’ When I asked him why, he replied, ‘Because I want to address you as a man and you are Mr. Burnum.’ That’s what he calls me to this day. He is just a neat, classy guy. He has my absolute appreciation.”

During college, Shawn worked for his stepdad as a painting supervisor. Shawn also ran his own painting company (Burnum Painting) in nearby Webb City.

“During summers at Pittsburg State, I also worked for a second home builder, which helped pay my way through school,” said Shawn. “I thought about becoming a construction attorney but fell in love and got married instead. That was 24 years ago.”

His wife Misty is from Riverton, Kansas.

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about 10 miles west of Joplin. The couple met at Pitt State, when they were in the same Anthropology class. “Before we met I noticed her car because I love cars,” recalled Shawn. “She had a red Z/28 Camaro and it was always clean. I had a suped-up truck and parked it off campus to avoid door dings. Every day I’d walk past the Camaro and could tell from the trinkets hanging from the mirror it was owned by a female. I thought whoever she is, she’s cool, and lo and behold I ended up marrying her.”

Misty sat next to me in class one day and we started talking,” continued Shawn. “I remember walking behind her as we were leaving class. She stopped at the Camaro and I had an ‘aha’ moment. We stayed in contact, and the next semester we were once again driving to campus and leaving at the same time. We both took Highway 40 north to Pittsburg, so I asked if she wanted to take turns carpooling to save gas money. The neat thing is that we were friends before we ever started dating, although the joke was that I was really just interested in her car.”

They were married in 1994, two weeks after Shawn graduated from PSU. “I graduated, got married, and moved to Kansas City for a job all within two weeks,” he stated. They celebrated their honeymoon in San Antonio because that was all the travel he could afford. “The funny thing is, that’s still one of our favorite places to go.”

THE ROAD BACK TO KANSAS CITY

Shawn started as a project engineer for a specialty contractor in the metal stud drywall business right out of school. He stayed with the company for 11 years, initially working in Kansas City for more than a year and then moving to a small office the company had in Tulsa, Oklahoma. After nine months in Tulsa, he spent 8-1/2 years in Denver (with the same specialty contractor), 7-1/2 of them as general manager for all of Colorado.

“I got a lot of great experience and learned a lot. We grew the business in Colorado significantly, and I was able to work on the new Mile High Stadium,” said Shawn. He then agreed to work at the parent company’s office in Omaha, where he became their Director of Education and Development.

“I was able to apply my master’s degree in organizational management and strategic thinking, but I’m a construction guy, and I was starting to feel removed from the action. With Misty’s encouragement, I joined a building materials distributor in St. Louis in 2005, and ran the Illinois side of their business. I was helping with their operations which included addressing inventory and logistics issues, but I still wasn’t using my construction skills.

“I had been taking some graduate level classes in distribution management with Texas A&M when they asked if I would do some satellite teaching for them. When I told Misty about this offer, she said, ‘Would you get back into construction, please?’ You are not happy unless your hair is on fire and you’ve got twelve balls in the air and you’re juggling all of them at once.’

“I knew who Doug Dahmer was by reputation, but I didn’t know him personally. So I reached out and started a dialogue. At that point he had already sold his company to PCI, had a five-year noncompete agreement with them, and wasn’t sure what he was going to do after that, but he wanted me to join them. I remember telling him I wasn’t going to go to work there when the guy who recruited me hadn’t made a long-term commitment.

“Later on, my brother-in-law, who is also in the drywall business, called and asked if I knew Doug Dahmer and if I would make an introduction. I called Doug and said, ‘Hey, I want to connect you with a contact of mine who’s in the Indianapolis area,’ and Doug replied, ‘Where are you at?’ I was still in St. Louis, and he said, ‘I’m coming to meet you for lunch tomorrow.’

“So he drove over from Kansas City the next day and said, ‘I’ve made a long-term commitment. When I do retire it will be at PCI, and I need you on our team. Let’s quit dancing and go to work.’ Right then I said, ‘Done.’ He’s been my champion here and a great friend, and he just retired at the end of 2017.’

A GENTLEMAN’S MARKET

Shawn joined PCG as Area Manager in December 2005, spending the first year and a half with the company traveling to and from the east coast. “I was project lead on the United States Census Bureau job just outside the Capital Beltway in Suitland, Maryland. PCI’s contract totaled over $20 million. The job involved mostly drywall,” he added. He also helped manage PCI’s operations in Boston.

“I would work Mondays from our Grandview office. On Tuesdays I’d fly back east to spend the week, and on Friday night I’d fly back home,” he recalled.

He was General Manager at PCI from October 2007 to July 2014. During this period, he managed the Kansas City group, and satellite operations were started in Joplin, Springfield and Des Moines.

“In the last few years, my responsibilities have evolved and I’ve transferred from the day-to-day operations of our local branch into a more corporate role,” said Shawn. “Gil Riemann is now the General Manager in Kansas City managing the day-to-day sales, operations, finances and strategic objectives for Kansas City, Springfield, Joplin and Des Moines. I am now the Division Manager of PCG’s Interior Division, with overall responsibility for the individual profit centers in Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, New York, Virginia, Maryland and Washington, D.C.”

PCI occasionally works on projects internationally. In 2013, Shawn worked on a job in Belgium for pharmaceutical company GSK (GlaxoSmithKline). “We have a European partner we’ve been associated with for a long time on multiple projects. I helped our two teams get the job up and running. It was very interesting to see how different the European construction methodology was from ours. You’d also go to the jobsite and all the meetings would be in French. I didn’t understand a word anyone was saying, but fortunately I could get caught up by reading the meeting minutes, which were in English.”

He takes a team approach to management, stating, “I would hope that if you were to ask anybody who worked for me they would say I care more about other people and the team than I care about myself or any one individual. When you’re running a company this big you have to have a global perspective, so I really try to be team focused. When the team wins, I win.

“I’ve done construction in a lot of different cities in the U.S. The unique and fun thing about Kansas City is that it is what I call a ‘gentleman’s market.’ It’s small enough that everyone knows everyone else, and I truly enjoy my competitors as people. The funny thing is we’ll kick each other’s teeth in at 2 p.m. when we’re doing a bid, but at 4 p.m. if any of us need help we’ll help each other out. That’s pretty special, and it’s not like that everywhere.”

PCI is a member of the Build Safe Partnership Program (BSPP), a formal cooperative partnership between The Builders’ Association, OSHA, and member companies meeting its eligibility requirements. “The Build Safe Partnership Program is an important way for us to make safety a part of our culture,” said Shawn. “Keeping the safety message fresh is a challenge, but The Builders’ Association has been a great partner in helping us continually reinforce safety awareness and best practices.”

THE RIGHT BALANCE

Shawn is grounded by “faith, family and a passion for getting up every day and doing what I love. These are my highest priorities,” he said.

He is an active member and vocalist at
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Lenexa Baptist Church, whose pastor, Chad McDonald, offered the invocation at The Builders’ Association’s Annual Banquet on February 23, 2018. Shawn is a baritone bass when singing in the choir and a tenor when helping lead music as a member of the worship team.

“I would like to tell you I’m really good at maintaining a balance, but I can become unbalanced pretty easily,” he laughed. “I come from a workaholic family. My mom and dad were both self-employed, and self-employed people tend to work a lot.

“I have a fully outfitted wood shop in our basement and if I’ve had a bad day, I’ll tell Misty I need to go make sawdust,” commented Shawn. His mom owned an antique furniture restoration company called Antiques Furniture Stripping of The Ozarks. “When I say the name, people think of a flea market, but they had stripping vats, people who repaired furniture, the whole gamut. My mom ran the business when she was a single parent, but as the years progressed, she joined my stepdad in construction.

“My grandfather and my uncle owned antique restoration businesses too, so I inherited the family craft, and I still enjoy it.” Shawn likes to repurpose old items, including a piano he made into a bed and a cabinet he built out of leftover table leaves. “I also do a lot of trim carpentry and build some things from scratch,” he commented.

Shawn has a love of American history and particularly presidential history. “Family vacation fun for me is going to a presidential library,” he said. His favorite is the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum in Springfield, Illinois, and this fall he plans to visit the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum in Simi Valley, California. On his office credenza are framed drawings of the two presidents, whom he admires most. The artwork was created by his daughter Tristan.

In addition to Tristan (17), Shawn and Misty have a son, Trent (19). Trent is a freshman at K-State studying restaurant management. He is also enrolled in their leadership studies program. “When Trent was in elementary school, he fell in love with preparing food. Any parent wants to see their kids find their passion, and it was clear he was passionate about cooking, so we got him involved in some junior culinary programs. He began working in a commercial restaurant as soon as he was old enough, and he eventually wants to run a restaurant.”

Tristan is a junior at Shawnee Mission East High School. “She played volleyball through the early part of high school and is very academic. She really enjoys math and science.”

Shawn said that when he and Misty first moved to Kansas City, she felt an immediate connection to Kansas City. “Her family is only two and a half hours south, Kansas City is a big enough city for me to make a good income in construction, and the people are so friendly here. Both of us were also drawn to the quality of the schools,” said Shawn.

She volunteers at their church a couple days a week. “Misty has a business management degree and an accounting degree from Pittsburg State, but once we started having kids, and particularly with my travel, she decided to be a stay-at-home mom. She also has a veterinarian assistant certificate because she really loves animals,” added Shawn.

The Burnums have two canines. “Anybody who knows the old Dukes of Hazzard TV show knows Daisy Duke, so we have Daisy, a Boston Terrier, and Duke, a Shih-poo.” (A Shih-poo is a Shih Tzu and Poodle mix.) “Duke is the youngest, but he absolutely runs the house,” said Shawn.

PCI is a Specialty Contractor member of the Kansas City Chapter, AGC, and the couple also frequently attend the AGC Fall Membership Meeting at Big Cedar.

PRIDE IN CRAFTSMANSHIP

At the most recent AGC Building Excellence Awards in 2016, PCI won Project of the Year by a Subcontractor for the Kansas City University of Medicine and Biosciences Academic Center Renovation. They were also a Finalist in the same category for Joplin High School/Franklin Technology Center.

Shawn stated that one of the projects he is most proud of locally is the Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts, where PCI workers handled metal stud framing, drywall insulation, installation of fire-stopping systems, and plaster work. He called the ceilings in both the Helzberg Hall and Muriel Kauffman Theatre “works of art” and shared a story that exemplifies not only his pride in the quality of work performed by PCI craftsman, but the pride his team members take in their own work as well.

The story involved Steve Banks, Senior Estimator who retired last September after a 13-year career with PCI and 47 years in the industry. “The greatest story I have about Steve occurred on the Kauffman Center job. We had completed work on the ceiling that swoops down toward the stage in Helzberg Hall. The 3”-thick white plaster had a beautiful fine sand finish and was a source of pride, but the design architect visited the site and rejected it. I was freaking out. I grabbed Steve and we drove to Kauffman Center, and when we got there you could see how slopchy the finish appeared to be.

“I asked Steve, ‘What are we going to do with this?’ and he calmly explained what appeared to be a flawed finish was caused by downlight reflecting off the scaffold deck. He assured everyone there that once the scaffold came down the slopchy appearance would go away. He insisted we at least try rolling out some black paper on half the scaffold, and sure enough, once half of it was covered the portion of the ceiling above it looked perfect.

Steve was absolutely right. What impressed me was his absolute confidence in the quality of our work.”

FORWARD LOOKING
Shawn paid tribute to Dirk Schafer, his predecessor as chairman. Dirk, who retired at the end of 2017 as President–Midwest Region, JE Dunn Construction Company, will remain on the board of The Builders’ Association as Immediate Past Chairman.

“Over the last year, with Dirk’s leadership and guidance, we were able to put some initiatives together related to growing our membership, creating synergies with other organizations, and defining a 2020 Vision that will provide guidance and benefit us in the immediate future and beyond.

“Dirk is not only confident but he is also a great listener, the ideal qualities you want in a leader. When we had executive meetings, he was very inclusive in terms of asking what we thought or how we felt about something, and really listening to different points of view. He never made you feel like he was right and you were wrong, even when you didn’t necessarily come to the same conclusion. He was always respectful of other points of view.

“I think Dirk was very respectful of The Builders’ Association’s heritage, history and legacy, while still trying to be relevant, fresh and new. That is a delicate balance, a balance that I am trying to strike too.” Shawn concluded, “You don’t want to forget where you’ve been, but you also need to be focused on where you’re going.” ▲