Scott Kelly Brings a Passion for Building and Midwestern Values to His Role as 2015 Chairman

Scott Kelly, President of Kelly Construction Group, Inc., a general contractor and construction manager in Overland Park, is our new Chairman for 2015. He has served on the board of The Builders’ Association from 2002 to 2005 and from 2008 to the present, and has been an officer of the board since 2011.

He was a Management Trustee on the Laborers Health and Welfare Fund from 2007 to 2012 and the Laborers Pension Fund from 2011 to 2012. He is also a member of The Builders’ Association Scholarship Foundation Golf Committee and the Public Relations & Social Events Committee.

Scott and his wife Julie have a son, Matthew (12), a 6th grade student at Curé of Ars Catholic School in Leawood, where the family attends church. They also have a Shar Pei named Khloe. Matthew is a Boy Scout, and is active in basketball and track at Curé of Ars. He is also active in Taekwondo.

“When Matthew was five, Julie and I were looking for an extracurricular activity for him and Julie came up with the idea of Taekwondo,” related Scott. “She had participated in the sport years ago with her father in California. Matthew went to our local martial arts school for a couple of years and then began egging me on to try it, and now he and I do it together. We both get a lot of enjoyment out of it.” Matthew and Scott both hope to get their black belts later this year.

Each summer the Kellys try to take a family vacation. In October, they are regulars at the Kansas City Chapter, AGC’s Annual Fall Retreat at Big Cedar Lodge in Branson, Missouri. “We all enjoy Big Cedar. It’s one of our favorite family things to do.”

Scott described his aspirations for Matthew in practical terms: “I want Matthew to be happy at whatever he does. I think most parents want that for their kids. I don’t know if he’ll go into the construction industry, but if he ever asks me how he can get involved I will certainly encourage him to take the steps necessary through formal education and hands-on learning to see if it’s for him.”

Scott met Julie in early 2001 while attending a company retreat in San Francisco for Taylor Ball. (Taylor Ball was a national construction company they both worked for at the time.) Julie, who is from Southern California, was in charge of business development for Taylor Ball’s San Diego office, while Scott was overseeing their Kansas City operations. “There were about 20 of us,” recalled Scott. “Julie and a mutual friend and I spent a day in San Francisco sightseeing together, having a great time. Later that year, I had a business meeting in San Diego and asked her to dinner. We dated long distance for several months and as they say, the rest is history.”

The couple was married in San Diego in 2002. A few days after the wedding they packed up Julie’s belongings and, with her Shar Pei Sophie in tow, headed east. “I drove the U-Haul from San Diego back to Kansas City and she drove my Jeep with Sophie in the passenger seat. I could see them in the rear view mirror all the way,” said Scott.

“Of all the places I’ve lived, Kansas City is by far my favorite,” he commented. “A lot of great people live here and are very open to meeting and doing business with people from other parts of the country. It’s a great community to raise a family and operate a business. I am very comfortable with its Midwestern values.”

Scott and Julie are strong supporters of Shawnee Mission Medical Center (SMMC). In 2007, the couple chaired the Tiny Tim Holiday Fantasy, a benefit for children and families served by the SMMC’s Lee Ann Brittain Infant Development Center and the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit. Julie is the 2014-2015 Board Chair of the Foundation for Shawnee Mission Medical Center. Last fall, she received the Richard V. Edmonds Award, which is given annually by the foundation to an outstanding citizen who helps promote the hospital and their work. She works as a paraprofessional with physically challenged children at the SMMC’s Infant Development Center.

EARLY YEARS

Scott is the oldest of six children (he has four brothers and one sister), and is the only one in construction. “Three of my brothers are motorcycle enthusiasts. They live in Iowa and have BMWs. Each summer they take a road trip and have been encouraging me repeatedly to attend. This past summer they finally convinced me to get a bike, so I bought a BMW R1200RT and resurrected my youth,” he smiled.

“Although I was unable to join them on their road trip to Texas last summer, I was fortunate to catch up with them for a portion of the return trip to Kansas City, and had a great time. I hope to work in a trip with them this summer wherever they decide to travel.”

Scott grew up in Fort Dodge, a town of about 25,000 in north central Iowa. “My father was the hometown physician there for close to 40 years,” he said. When Dr. John (Jack) Kelly was awarded the Iowa Academy of Family Physicians Lifetime Achievement Award in 2000, Scott was on hand for the ceremony in Des Moines.

“Turns out my dad delivered many of my classmates I attended school with, and he was a man of few words,” added Scott. Scott’s mother was a nurse when his parents met. After they were married, “She became a homemaker with six kids who kept her busy full-time. My dad was gone a lot being a...” (continued on next page)
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family practitioner and mom kept the home running very smoothly.

“Although Dad was a physician, his main love was trains and steam engines. When I was growing up, we had a model railroad in our basement and one running around the backyard. He was into lathe and metal tooling, and enjoyed making parts for engines and restoring them. He had two other partners in town who practiced with him and he worked on their automobiles. I don’t have the meticulous ability he had, but I learned a lot from him. When he passed away, I inherited most of his railroad stuff, and I’ve got it set up in my shop at home.”

Scott became interested in construction early on. “When I was about 13, my folks had a large family room added onto the back of our home. The addition was built by two old-school carpenters. They would take time to show me how they did things, and from there I developed a love of building.” But construction was not his only passion.

“Growing up, I always enjoyed winter, especially ATVs and outdoor activities,” he commented. “During high school I attended a career day and heard about St. John’s University in Collegeville, Minnesota. Their school representative gave me an informational booklet about the school and on the front cover was a picture of the university and a guy cross-country skiing through the woods in a snow storm. I think I was sold on the school immediately.” Scott enrolled at St. John’s and earned his B.S. in Business Administration there in 1984. He went on to receive a B.S. in Construction Engineering from Iowa State in 1987.

At Fort Dodge Senior High School, Scott played linebacker and guard on the Dodgers football team. He played recreational basketball in college and for many years afterward. He tries to return to Ames once a year to see the Cyclones play basketball at Hilton Coliseum.

He credits his parents for grounding him in old-fashioned values. “I was expected to tell the truth, and my friends were raised with the same values. I’ve found that when you deal honestly with people they usually deal with you the same way. I am very straightforward.

When I say I’m going to do something I do it, and I expect that of everybody I work with. That’s the way we operate as a company.

“When it comes to building a team, it’s important to have faith in the people you work with and to surround yourself with people who are smarter than you are,” continued Scott. “I’ve also found that as a general contractor, there are certain key things you want your people to know, including how to estimate and how to communicate with people. Communication skills are important at every level.”

When he was finishing his Construction Engineering degree at Iowa State, Scott got a phone call from Jack Taylor, a principal at Ringland-Johnson-Crowley Construction Co. “Jack met me on campus to talk about my going to work for them. I was fortunate enough to get hired, and I began my career at their Des Moines office in 1987,” said Scott. In 1988, Jack Taylor bought Ringland-Johnson-Crowley and renamed it Taylor Ball.

**ALL IN A DAY’S WORK**

Scott shared a humble (and humorous) story from his early years in business. He moved to Taylor Ball’s San Diego office for about 2-1/2 years in the early 90s. While in San Diego, he remembers working on several large public works bid projects. “Back then, Jack Taylor would often fly out to San Diego from Des Moines the day before a bid to assist us on large bid projects, which were usually due by the traditional 2 p.m. deadline. Jack’s travel schedule was very busy, and he often returned to Des Moines as soon as possible to conduct other business. The only problem was that there was only one return flight back to Des Moines and it was at 2:20 p.m., which required him to leave the office by 1:55 to make his flight.

“We had a system down where Jack would drive (always) and a co-driver would accompany him. Jack would pull up directly in front of the terminal and exit, and the co-driver would return the car to the rental car facility. A second car would then pick up the co-driver at the rental car facility and return to the office.

“On this particular day I was selected as the co-driver. While entering the main terminal drive lane at the airport, we were cut off by another vehicle and forced to hit the vehicle in front of us. Jack immediately got out, checked on the condition of the passengers of the vehicle we had hit, returned to our car, and without hesitation grabbed his briefcase, looked at me and stated, ‘You’ll take care of this for me won’t you Scott?’ and left. After completing several accident forms and returning the car to the rental facility, it was great learning that at least we were successful on the project we bid that day.”

**MOVING TO KANSAS CITY**

Scott returned to Iowa before moving to Kansas City in 1997. He said he has benefitted from his company’s membership in The Builders’ Association from his first days in Kansas City. “When I was transitioning from Iowa to Kansas City there was a labor dispute between Taylor Ball and one of the local labor organizations,” he recalled. “Skip Hutton [President of The Builders’ Association from 1986-2001] taught me the importance of finding common ground and understanding that neither side will ever be perfectly happy with the outcome. It’s a perspective I’ve been able to bring to a variety of situations over the years.”

Scott has also enjoyed the personal relationships he has developed through The Builders’ Association. “One of my favorite memories was in 2005 when we were on a Builders’ Board retreat in Cabo San Lucas, Mexico,” he recalled. “Don Pearce was Chairman at the time. I knew the board members, but Julie and I did not know many of the spouses. On Saturday afternoon Don’s wife Linda invited everyone to a social hour. It really resonated with me how the Association fosters a great atmosphere for people to connect.”

In late 2001, Jack Taylor formed Taylor Construction Group with locations in Des Moines, Cedar Rapids, Las Vegas, San Diego, and Kansas City. The Kansas City Division, known as Taylor Kelly, was a participant in the Build Safe Partnership Program with OSHA. Scott said he looks forward to his current

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company, Kelly Construction Group, becoming a participant in the program once again.

When Scott and his partners purchased the Kansas City Division in 2006, the transition to being a business owner brought new professional challenges. “When I was working for Taylor Construction Group, which was a fairly large corporation, there were certain functions that were primarily handled at the corporate level, such as human resources, insurance and bonding. As an owner at Taylor Kelly, I had to learn a lot of those functions, which was somewhat challenging because I had been so focused on bidding and building.”

Taylor Kelly evolved into the current Kelly Construction Group in 2010. “I’ve been even more involved in the day-to-day aspects of running the business with Kelly Construction Group, but the transition has been well worth it. We’re now in our fourth year with the new company and it’s been a very good journey,” he commented.

During the global recession that began in the late 2000s, he noted, “I had confidence in the Kansas City economy, our firm’s staff, the business owners in Kansas City, and the subcontractors we’d worked with that the market would come back, but like everyone else I didn’t know when. I was fortunate to have several mentors who were telling me what their view of the economy was. Jim Delaney with Turner told me he felt that the bottom would hit in late 2013 or early 2014 and that the market would recover from there. I listened to him and he was right. We operate our company very conservatively, and we’ve been fortunate to see the market and our business take off during the last 12 months.”

Scott added, “I would like to build a company that’s successful enough with a large enough client base so that the next generation can take it over and continue to be successful for themselves. I’m really proud of the fact that we’ve survived as long as we have and that our reputation is very good.”

**AWARD-WINNING PROJECTS**

Taylor Kelly built the Waddell & Reed United Investors Office Building F in Shawnee Mission, Kansas. It was a Finalist in the Project of the Year by a General Contractor (Over $10 Million) category at the Kansas City Chapter, AGC Building Excellence Awards in 2002. “It was probably one of the first high profile jobs we did that put us on the map in Kansas City,” remembers Scott.

Riverfront Pedestrian Bridge was a Finalist in the Project of the Year by a General Contractor ($1 to $5 Million) category in 2004. The bridge links the River Market to the Richard L. Berkley Riverfront Park and includes an observation deck about 70 feet above the Missouri River. “One of our superintendents had completed a project there several years earlier with Rau Construction while working on the Steamboat Arabia Museum,” commented Scott. “There was a homeless camp at the base of the bridge and when we went there to look at the work, a couple of the homeless guys surprisingly remembered him. They were still there after all those years.”

The Kansas City Music Hall Renovations project was a Finalist in the Renovation Project of the Year by a General Contractor category in 2008. “The project was very complex and involved an aggressive schedule with extensive structural demolition and heavy structural improvements above the stage. New stage rigging was also needed to accommodate future Broadway show productions. Our field performed a spectacular job in completing the project safely and on time,” said Scott.

Kelly Construction Group is currently working on a number of projects including the Multi-Specialty Clinic, a 12,000 square foot medical clinic for The University of Kansas Hospital at 12000 West 110th Street in Overland Park. The project, which is scheduled for completion in July, will provide various levels of healthcare to its walk-in clients.

In September 2014, they began renovating the former Halls Plaza building at 211 Nichols Road. The new concept, called Plaza 211, will transform the 35,000 square foot Halls space into space for six to eight upscale retailers and one or two restaurants by midsummer. Part of the second (top) floor retail space will be converted to parking, increasing the number of parking spaces from 660 to around 750 vehicles. The existing precast, which dates to the building’s opening in 1965, will be removed and replaced with new cladding designed to complement the surrounding Spanish architecture.

Kelly Construction Group is restoring the 1923 Linwood Presbyterian Church Building and constructing a new link between it and the adjacent four-story Harold Thomas Center, which they are renovating. The project is part of the Linwood Area Ministry Place (LAMP) development at Highway 71 and Linwood Boulevard, and is scheduled for completion this summer.

**GOALS AS CHAIRMAN**

Scott is a mentor and proponent of the Mentor/Mentee Program, which is designed to further the Construction Leadership Council’s (CLC’s) mission of developing strong future leaders for the industry. He credited Justin Waters, current Chair of the CLC and Project Manager, Heart of America Group, with encouraging him to participate in the program. Scott described his recent mentor/mentee relationship with Mike Swift, Surety Account Executive, Thomas McGee, LC, as a “partnership.”

“Mike and I got together for lunch several times last year,” recalled Scott. “I think I turned into the protégé and he the mentor. He gave me some great ideas on the industry and business, and it was a very worthwhile exercise for me. As a result of that experience I’m going to promote mentoring to our board members who haven’t been involved.

“Working with people willing to offer their real-world experience and knowledge has helped me extensively in my construction career,” he added. “I’ve learned from a number of mentors in the industry.”

Scott also wants to focus on attracting a new generation of workers to construction. “We need to reach people and generate an interest in construction while they are young and impressionable. Many of those currently in the construction industry made a career decision after hearing about it at a young age.

“One of my favorite sayings is ‘Opportunity is infinite but capital is finite,’” he continued. “I like to put a little twist on that as it concerns our industry. I like to say, ‘Opportunity is infinite but quality people are finite.’ It’s been very difficult finding qualified people in recent years due to the fallout from the economic downturn we went through and highly qualified people leaving the industry. The industry has lost a lot of good highly qualified craftsmen and we as business owners are all trying to staff our projects now that the economy has improved. We now need highly-trained energetic office and field staff more than ever.”

Scott also said he liked a suggestion made by fellow Builders’ board member Scott Hoisington, Deputy Operations Manager, Turner Construction Company. “Scott pointed out that we need to reach the parents of these children and educate them about how good this industry really is. Anyone who is willing to work hard can make a very good living in construction.”

Kelly Construction Group is committed to assisting the next generation of construction professionals with their formal education in construction-related fields. In 2009, they funded the Kelly Construction Group, Inc. Scholarship – one of 18 named scholarships now given annually by The Builders’ Association Scholarship Foundation to qualified applicants from major universities.

Scott said he wants to build on the efforts of Phil Thomas, Immediate Past Chairman, to foster member engagement in the Association. “I admire the way Phil is able to make people feel at ease,” said Scott. “I think this was instrumental in his role as chairman and the way he has been able to promote the social side of The Builders’ Association. He can bring a group of people together who wouldn’t typically attend a social event and they end up having a very enjoyable time. The Association’s role in getting people together and developing relationships is something I would like to continue to encourage.”

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