Darin Heyen, Our New 2019 Chairman, Aspires to a Builders’ Association That ‘Educates and Excites Our Next Generation’

Darin Heyen has assumed the role of 2019 Chairman of the Board of The Builders’ Association. He became Vice Chairman and a member of the Association’s Executive Board in 2018. He previously served as President of the Association’s sister organization, the Kansas City Chapter of the Associated General Contractors of America (AGC), from 2013 to 2014.

He is President of Pearce Construction, a general contractor whose clients range from nonprofit and faith-based organizations to commercial, financial, medical and more. He has a B.S. degree in Architecture from the Kansas State University College of Architecture and Design, and is a licensed architect in Kansas and Missouri. He is also a member of the National Council of Architectural Registration Boards and the AIA (American Institute of Architects) Kansas City.

Darin is a member of The Builders’ Association’s Membership Recruitment and Inclusion Committee. He has served on The Builders’ Association’s General Labor Committee and the Carpenters’ Management Negotiating Committee. He is also a past member of the National AGC’s Accreditation Evaluation Board.

Membership in The Builders’ Association has had a “huge” impact on his business, he said. “As a medium size contractor, we’re able to utilize all of the services the Builders’ offers. The Association provides us the resources, experience and talent to improve and grow our business in numerous ways.”

“Healing chairing of an organization as prestigious as The Builders’ Association is humbling,” he continued. “It is an honor and a major responsibility to serve in that leadership role. The Builders’ Association is comprised of more than 780 member firms employing thousands of employees. Many of our companies have had several generations of family leadership, and one is in its sixth generation of leadership,” he added.

During his address to the more than 400 people who attended The Builders’ Association’s Annual Banquet on February 22, Darin stated, “Our members have literally built this city. They’ve built thousands of buildings throughout the Midwest and even coast-to-coast. They are the unsung heroes of the building environment. We build the buildings in which everyone works, lives, plays and worships. Oftentimes others get the credit, but the men and women in this room are responsible for taking the design concept and making it a reality.

“One thing that amazes me about our industry is how sophisticated the nature of our business is. While we utilize construction methods that are decades old, we also utilize sophisticated computer systems and equipment to constantly improve our processes. Buildings are increasingly more complicated. They are built with more layers of infrastructure. We are held to the highest standards when it comes to the health, safety and welfare of our community,” he added.

ENGAGEMENT

Darin has chosen engagement as the theme he wants to promote in 2019. “I challenge each of our members at every level – ownership, executive management, field staff and project management – to engage and get involved. Get your people involved in the Builders’. You will not be disappointed.

“I want to expand our Association’s outreach and involvement within our own companies. I want to see our Association educate and excite the next generation,” he continued.

“Through my involvement with the Association, I’ve had the honor of getting to know many of our members – people with outstanding character and knowledge of our industry. Not only our subcontractors, suppliers and service providers, but our competition. I’ve been able to develop very valuable personal relationships with direct competitors through the Association, and I think that’s one of the great benefits of membership,” he added.

2020 VISION PLAN

Darin is a strong believer in the Association’s focus on strategic planning as embodied in the “2020 Vision Plan.”

“Over the past decade, membership in professional associations has declined, and the Builders’ is no exception. Several years ago our Association recognized the need for greater relevance and improved services for our members. In 2016, the initiative to develop the 2020 Vision was launched. The Builders’ staff and board members began to identify the strengths and weaknesses within the services we offer. With metrics in place to view and monitor our progress objectively, the Vision Plan was not only developed but was successfully implemented. We’ve redefined our services and our financial reporting structures in order to manage, evaluate and improve those services.

“I admire the work my two predecessor chairmen, Dirk Schafer and Shawn Burnum, as well as Don Greenwell and the Builders’ staff, have put into the Vision Plan. One of my goals is to follow through and continue to implement the objectives it outlines.

“I’ve seen a tremendous change in the perception of the Builders’ because of the plan, and I love the accountability, the vision, and how we’re growing as an Association. In an age where so many Associations are becoming irrelevant, we’re becoming more relevant to our members, and I think a lot of that is because of

(continued on next page)
**2019 Chairman (continued from page 1)**

the vision of both boards and our staff.”

**BACKGROUND IN ARCHITECTURE**

In 1994, Darin was project architect on the First National Bank of Kansas (in Overland Park) when he met Don Pearce, whose company, Pearce Construction, was the general contractor.

Darin had practiced architecture for 12 years and had made the transition from architecture to construction in 1976. Darin made a similar transition when, after practicing architecture for four years, he joined Pearce Construction in 1995.

“As my relationship with Don developed, it became evident that we had a lot of interests in common. We have a similar vision with regard to the building process and the contractor/architect/owner relationship, and we share a strong commitment to family and faith,” commented Darin. “I also came to realize that I wasn’t really leaving the profession of architecture, I was simply using my architectural experience and education in a different capacity.”

Darin was named vice president of Pearce Construction in 2001 and became president of the company in 2009. He follows in Don Pearce’s footsteps in another respect: Don was Chairman of The Builders’ Association (in 2005) and President of the Kansas City Chapter, AGC (1995-96).

After Darin joined Pearce Construction, his three children were curious to know what he did at work each day, he recalled with a smile.

“Years ago, when our children were younger, we were having dinner one night and they asked, ‘Dad, do you build buildings?’ I answered, ‘Yes. Sure I do,’ and they asked, ‘Do you paint?’ I replied, ‘No, I don’t paint,’ and they followed with, ‘Do you do the bricks?’ and I answered, ‘No, I don’t do the bricks.’ Finally they asked, ‘Do you hammer?’ and I answered, ‘No, I don’t hammer.’ They were kind of quiet for a minute before they said, ‘You don’t really build buildings, do you?’

“I may not be a skilled tradesman,” said Darin. “I may not be doing the physical work in the field, but make no mistake about it, as contractors we are very, very involved in how our buildings are built. We are all responsible for providing the best product for the owner’s budget that we possibly can, and for protecting the safety of the workers who build them.”

**HIGH QUALITY, ENERGY EFFICIENT**

Darin said that Pearce Construction “strives to meet and exceed our client’s expectations whether the project is new construction, a building addition, or an owner-occupied building renovation. Our focus is on delivering high quality, energy-efficient buildings for owners who want to control their budget and schedule.”

Their focus on energy-efficiency extends to their own building in South Kansas City, Missouri. In 2017, Pearce Construction installed solar rooftop panels as part of a partnership with KCP&L and the Missouri Solar Renewable Energy Credits (SREC) Program.

Pearce Construction typically works within a 50-mile radius of their headquarters. They often have jobs going in St. Joseph, Warrensburg, Lawrence and Topeka. They also self-perform all rough and finish carpentry including doors and frames, and install hardware as well as cabinetry. The size of their current staff – 10 office workers and 25 field workers – has been pretty consistent over the last 20 years, noted Darin.

**GOALS AS CHAIRMAN**

In addition to encouraging engagement across the board with membership, Darin plans to address the “ongoing need to educate Builders’ members on the opportunities that exist through the Association and with our six sets of services. We offer so much from a professional development standpoint for member companies to take advantage of, whether it’s learning more about BIM, leadership, or finance.

“At a recent board meeting we talked about applying BIM technology to smaller and medium-sized companies that don’t have a BIM division. A BIM-light or a Lean Construction-light course would allow those firms to start using these skills and techniques right away. We also talked about offering a targeted and focused development class like succession planning, especially for those in their 30s, 40s and 50s who are taking over companies.

“Another professional development class we talked about is Excel. You might think everyone knows how to use Excel, but it is not always offered in high schools and colleges, and it is often self-taught. I would like to see us offer advanced classes in Excel, with formulas, spreadsheets, multiple work pages, and workbooks. At Pearce Construction, we estimate with a custom Excel template. It is a massive spreadsheet that can be very intimidating for those who haven’t received advanced training.

“We might even talk about offering a foreign language like Spanish to keep up with the changing composition of the workforce. Speaking a foreign language can also facilitate construction safety.”

Darin also wants to focus on achieving a more sustainable membership. “I’d like to reduce the amount of turnover within our membership by focusing on recruiting companies who will remain committed to The Builders’ Association for the long-term.”

**Our firm has 15-plus years of experience working with Darin Heyen. He is passionate about translating the client’s vision and the architectural design into cost-effective, functional and creative built environments. He places high importance on good communication, excellent craftsmanship and overall value, and demands the same from others. From the beginning of the design phase through construction completion, I’ve witnessed Darin putting our client’s needs and the integrity of the project first, countless times. As an architect and a contractor, he has a unique ability to offer creative solutions to problems that arise during design and construction, and the leadership skills necessary to bring the project team together for the best result.

– Skylar Phelps, AIA
Vice President, Mantel Teter

**KEY TRAITS**

When interviewing prospective hires for an office or field position, Darin considers passion for the construction industry to be a key trait.

“When you ask someone, ‘Tell me about your passion. What do you like to do?’ it’s amazing what their answer will tell you;” he commented. He remembers posing the question to Ryan Warman in 2014 when Ryan was a practicing architect.

“Ryan approached me and asked why I’d left architecture to go into construction. It soon became evident that we clicked on a personal level and that he had the qualifications I was looking for. When I asked what he liked to do for fun, he answered, ‘I like to weld.’ He said that when he graduated with his Master’s in Architecture from KU, he bought a welder as a present to himself, and that he enjoys making furniture out of steel as a hobby.

“Ryan’s answer told me a lot, especially that he’s creative, knows how to put things together, and isn’t afraid to get his hands dirty,” said Darin.

Ryan joined Pearce Construction as a project manager in 2015. He became their Vice President of Construction Management in 2017. He is also President-Elect of AIA Kansas City. Ryan’s term as President will begin in 2020.

“Having architects in leadership positions allows us to provide a unique level of preconstruction services to our owners,” said Darin. “We’ve been on the design side and know how to design buildings. We are very good at putting ourselves in an owner’s position and understanding how, if this were our building, we would want it done. We know the right kinds of questions to ask architects as well as subcontractors and suppliers to provide the best value for our clients because ultimately, it’s the client’s building, it’s their money.

“I’m very passionate about this industry, and I’m very passionate about this business. I’m very blessed that I enjoy what I do for a living. I love coming to work. I love the thrill of finding the job, winning the job, estimating the job, and building the job. I love getting to know the owner and developing repeat clientele.

“I’m an early morning person, and it is not unusual for me to wake up at 5 o’clock on a Saturday morning, put on a ball cap, come to the office and work until noon.”

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2019 Chairman
(continued from page 2)

A number of other qualities are important to Darin, especially when evaluating someone’s leadership potential. One is problem-solving ability. “We can train anyone to perform a particular task, but the person who is self-motivated will know how to find the answer when faced with a challenge.” Another is personal demeanor. “This is a very professional industry, so we’re looking for someone who can handle pressure.” An additional trait is humility. “One of the things we look for, especially in our young project managers, is whether they will ask the superintendent questions so they can gain from their experience.”

Darin said that he would like to be seen as a servant leader, a style of leadership which emphasizes service to others. “I think confidence and humility are important leadership qualities and ones that I aspire to. I’m a non-confrontational type of person. I believe in using the power of persuasion when interacting with others. I’m not afraid to speak up, but I don’t need to be the center of attention. I won’t shy away from the spotlight, but I’m certainly not seeking it. I’d rather be the type of leader who puts the spotlight on other people.”

He also believes in “listening twice as much as you speak. I admire the leaders who, when they do speak up, immediately have people’s attention because they are known for being pertinent and relevant.”

Family Life

Darin was raised in Wichita, Kansas. His father was a facilities manager for an oil refinery and his mother was a grade school teacher who still lives in Wichita. He has one sibling, an older brother who manages the Wichita division of a regional bank. The family regularly attended church together.

He was enrolled by his parents in a junior golf program and has been playing golf ever since. For several years, he and a group of friends – none of whom are in the same profession – have enjoyed a regular weekly game. In addition to Darin they include a doctor, medical equipment salesman, sports architect, attorney, and information technology officer.

Darin and his wife Lauren will celebrate their 28th wedding anniversary in September. They have three children. Kalyn (25) graduated from K-State in 2018. She is an Assistant auditor who still lives in Wichita. He has one sibling, an older brother who manages the Wichita division of a regional bank. The family regularly attended church together.

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Darin described Darin as a “friend, a mentor, and a great business partner. Don has been hugely influential in the development of my career and in my personal development. I literally could not have asked for a better person to help me learn about the industry and challenge me to grow in my career. Don served as President of the AGC and Chairman of the Board of The Builders’ Association, and I’m thrilled to be able to follow in his footsteps. Don has always devoted energy to improving our business, and if I had an idea to help us improve he wasn’t afraid to invest in it and ride with me. He would let me fail, but he was always there as a partner, encouraging me. “I’m thrilled that Don can enjoy this next stage of his life. We don’t like to call it retirement – just that he is taking a lot more time off without the financial responsibility. Don will always have an office here and continue to be involved in a consultative role. I will continue to bounce ideas off of him and seek his counsel and wisdom,” he added.

Payed Tribute

Darin paid tribute to Shawn Burnum, his predecessor as chairman in 2018. Shawn, who is Vice President of Operations, PCI (Performance Contracting Inc.), remains an officer of The Builders’ Association board.

“I think Shawn’s leadership as chairman was outstanding. He did a wonderful job helping implement the 2020 Vision Plan. Once Dirk Schafer [2017 Chairman of The Builders’ Association] got the plan set and in place, Shawn was very effective in implementing it and holding people accountable. I hope to continue that accountability during my chairmanship. “I’ve really enjoyed getting to know Shawn and we have become good friends. I have a tremendous amount of respect for him and his wife Misty, and am grateful for their commitment to the industry. Shawn’s leadership with PCI both locally and nationally has been an invaluable resource for The Builders’ Association, but he is not all about PCI. He’s about what’s going to make our heartland region and this industry better.”