

## BUSINESS

# How I Made It Bryson Reaume builds a reputation for restoration



Bryson Reaume, co-founder of City Constructors Inc., at his offices in Los Angeles. His company has been the design-to-completion general contractor on a number of downtown L.A. restoration and reuse projects (Brian van der Brug / Los Angeles Times)



By **Ronald D. White** · Contact Reporter

MARCH 27, 2016, 3:00 AM

**T**he **gig:** Bryson Reaume, 35, is president of City Constructors Inc., one of the companies working on the renaissance of Los Angeles' urban core. The company he founded at age 23 has been the design-to-completion general contractor on a number of downtown Los Angeles restoration and reuse projects, including the Rowan and El Dorado lofts. Other projects included turning an old apartment building into the AKA Beverly Hills Hotel and overhauling the Best Western Hollywood Hills.

**Steady work:** Reaume said his company currently has 38 employees, having come back from dramatic workforce cutbacks during the recession. "We're expecting to do between \$35 million and \$40 million in

business this year," he said. "My business partner Evan Richardson has been absolutely instrumental in the growth of our company," Reaume said. "I get a lot from his drive and his work ethic."

**Better than Lego:** Reaume's love of building things came from pieces a lot bigger than Lego bricks. His dad was a general contractor for residential construction. "I worked construction and did a lot of odd jobs even during the school year. I learned a massive amount from that."

**G.I. Joe:** Just past his mid-teens, Reaume saw college tuition rise and heard about graduates who weren't quickly finding jobs. A better way, he thought, might be to join the military and later use veterans benefits to defray college costs. "I enlisted in the Army when I was 17. I was pre-planning for college money, plus those recruiters were pretty persuasive," Reaume said. "My parents had to sign me away to allow me to do it because I was so young." Reaume trained as a combat medic, then served in the Army Reserve for about seven years.

**The pluses:** The good part about that move, other than serving his country, was that his military training gave him "excellent preparation" for the business world he would join in his early 20s. "You have an objective. You prepare on how to accomplish it. You work as a team, which is perfect training for a general contractor. Plus, there is learning about the chain of command," Reaume said.

**The minuses:** The U.S. military these days relies rather heavily on its reserves. "I got activated during 9/11," Reaume said. He was never sent overseas and sounded sorry that he didn't do more when he noted, "It was not very exciting, but we did do some satellite communications work." The return to active service also interrupted his schooling at San Luis Obispo's Cuesta College, which he hasn't gone back to complete.

**Love at first site:** In the early 2000s, Reaume took a job he thought would be a one-off, helping out restoring an old downtown office building. He immediately loved it. "It was the Douglas Building Lofts downtown," Reaume said. "I still remember walking through that building. It was so dilapidated it looked like something from a Mad Max movie. They turned into this absolutely amazing building."

**Big Leap:** It wasn't easy applying his knowledge of residential construction and battlefield medicine to running a company vying for a piece of major commercial projects. "It was a sharp learning curve," Reaume said, "like drinking from a fire hose was how I usually described it back then." As a general contractor, his company manages overall construction, from putting together the right team of subcontractors to matters such as quality control, scheduling and logistics.

**Stand Out:** "We were fortunate enough to have teamed up with a fantastic developer, Goodwin Gaw of Gaw Capital Partners," Reaume said. "He trusted us. He saw our drive and what we wanted to become. He was the catalyst that allowed us to grow so much pre-recession." Gaw became a role model. "What I

noticed about Gaw and really liked was that he was always very calm and levelheaded in the face of chaos. A lot of things can go wrong, budgets are busted, decisions and designs not made properly. But he always thought things through and made very rational decisions."

**Surviving meltdown:** Reaume said his company grew "from just two people working inside the Douglas Building project" to 50 employees. When the downturn hit, Reaume had to lay off all but 14 employees. To keep his company in business, he worked at cost and accepted no fees. "We must have turned down millions of dollars in fees," he said. Reaume said clients still remember that.

**Do what you love:** City Constructors built a reputation for historic accuracy and bringing projects in on time and at or under budget. Reaume remembers working on the restoration of St. Vibiana's Cathedral, restoring its tower and cupola as well as its bathrooms. "When you see the news and press around the restoration and people rallying around this downtown Los Angeles landmark, it feels good to be a part of that," Reaume said. "We love re-creating these buildings."

**Advice:** Be a secure boss who doesn't worry about employees outshining him. "You have to build a good team. You should always surround yourself with people who are smarter than you," Reaume said, "because you can also learn from them and grow with them. That has been huge for me."

**Personal:** Reaume lives in Los Angeles with his wife, Monica, and two small children. He's had a lot of interesting hobbies that he no longer has time for, such as flying and Brazilian jujitsu. He said he looks forward to the day when his children are a little older "and we can walk or drive down these streets and I can say, 'Yep, daddy helped build that one, and that one, and that one.'"

*ronald.white@latimes.com*

*Twitter: @RonWLATimes*

Copyright © 2016, Los Angeles Times

A version of this article appeared in print on March 27, 2016, in the Business section of the Los Angeles Times with the headline "Building a restoration reputation - HOW I MADE IT: BRYSON REAUME" — Today's paper | [Subscribe](#)

**This article is related to:** [Business](#)