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NEVADAN AT WORK: Executive stands ready to help Las Vegas build its future

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LAS VEGAS REVIEW-JOURNAL

Building runs in the family, so it's just a matter of time before Jack Breslin exits the business he founded nearly 30 years ago in Las Vegas and hands the reins to his son, Ryan.

Breslin, whose grandfather worked in construction, figures to remain active in the day-to-day operations of Breslin Builders, but it's the next generation of project managers and superintendents that will guide the company through these challenging economic times, he said.

Like every general contractor in Las Vegas, Breslin Builders has scaled back operations, selling off old equipment and reducing staff to about 40 employees from a peak of 180. Annual revenue fell from about \$100 million to \$40 million.

"It's not easy," Breslin said as he prepared for a conference call in his office on Polaris Avenue. "We'll have to live within the work we do here. Luckily, we have a clientele that we've had for years that are still building, like Rebel Oil."

The company started construction in June on a \$2 million Rebel Oil gasoline station and car wash at Craig Road and Commerce Street, the 35th Rebel station to be built by Breslin in the Las Vegas Valley.

Breslin said he retained a core group of employees who worked side by side with him framing buildings for 25 years, guys such as Bob Fox, Ray Hernandez and Ron Gomez. His office manager, Kathie Rienmiller, has been there for more than 15 years.

They will mentor the younger guys -- Steve Moore, Kevin Owens and Ryan Breslin, who recently received his contractors' license from the Nevada State Contractors Board and has been promoted to vice president.

"Including my son, they're going to learn how to do business at a very difficult time," Breslin said. "You've got to be smarter, sharper and work harder to produce a better value."

Breslin, the son of a plumber, joined the local carpenters union after graduating from Clark High School. He started his own framing company when he was 23. He moved to Idaho for a couple years in the late 1970s, came back to Las Vegas and founded Breslin Builders in 1980.

Question: What are some of your bigger projects in Las Vegas?

Answer: The high-rises downtown, SoHo and Newport Lofts.

Question: What does it take to run a construction company?

Answer: Hard work. Determination. Understanding of the construction field. You have to know how to manage a lot of different disciplines. Being a natural builder is one thing. Knowing how to run a business is another. You have to understand your clients, know how to perform on a budget, and usually the budget is tight. You've got to enjoy what you do, and I enjoy building.

Question: Your commercial projects have included bank branches, shopping centers and restaurants. Where are new opportunities in Las Vegas? Medical buildings? Public works?

Answer: For us, for Breslin, we've always been in the private sector. We've evolved into a design-build contractor because of my clientele. We think it's a better method of delivery. Our opportunity is to keep our steady clientele and our reputation of putting out a good product and good value.

Question: How hard is it to contract new projects?

Answer: Work is tight now. There are 20 general contractors going after every job, a lot of public works and roads. Quite frankly, I'd rather stay in the market niche we fit better in. The odds of getting a project at one out of 20 are not very good for me.

I've never said I'm only going to build this. We're doing a radio tower at Mormon Mountain (near Moapa). We built Bali Hai and Stallion Mountain (golf courses). I've always done vertical, but there's always something else I'll do. I'm not afraid to jump into something else.

Again, the design-build opens different avenues for us. We'll take projects that make good sense. I'd rather do a few projects well than take projects just to keep food on the table and make paychecks. We're good at small- to medium-sized commercial and we continue to do that today.

Question: How much capital did you have to start your business?

Answer: I had very little capital. I had a startup company, myself and one other employee. We landed one job, a guy took a chance on us, a medical optometrist, and it turned out well. We went from there to another project and created our niche and put the money we made back in the company.

Question: How do you see the future for Breslin Builders in Las Vegas?

Answer: It has as much opportunity as it always has. This town is at one of its lows right now. I've seen two lows -- not at this level -- but we experienced them and went through them. I've lived here long enough to understand people come to Las Vegas because it's Las Vegas. We know the town will rebound and we'll be part of it.

Question: How have you been able to retain your best employees during good times and bad times?

Answer: Breslin or any good company is nothing without a good employee base, and our employees are who Breslin are. They have a say in what goes on here. They're part of the decision process and we're like family.

Question: For years, we heard that Las Vegas was overbuilt. Was there ever too much construction?

Answer: I think there's always a balance. I think we were a little over on the balance side. We were running a little faster than I'd like. I'm pro-building, as is any contractor, within reason, and now we're swinging the other way. There is really no movement in construction. Lending is difficult right now. The Strip drives the town. It's got a lot of overbuilding, in my opinion, but we'll see how it plays out.

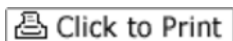
Question: Are you doing anything else?

Answer: I have a lot of other businesses that keep me busy. I'm developing my own stuff with Impact Development. That's where a lot of my time is spent. We're doing Durango Commons (at Durango Drive and Windmill Lane), so we have 130,000 square feet of professional offices in two buildings. Allegiant Airlines has its headquarters there. I'll keep doing development. That's where my heart is.

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