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IN DEPTH: PHILADELPHIA 100

Childhood experience prompts builder today

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Angelo Perryman couldn't ignore a desire to go into construction even if he wanted. It's in his blood.

"I was laying bricks as early as 10," Perryman said from his tidy West Philadelphia office in the Enterprise Center, which helps entrepreneurs grown businesses in an urban environment.

That's where he runs Perryman Building and Construction Services Inc., a development and construction company that has worked on a range of large and small projects in Philadelphia.

Some of those projects include: installing 64,000 luxury suite and stadium seats at Lincoln Financial Field; putting up the interior partitions and acoustical ceilings for future vending operations at Philadelphia International Airport's new Terminal One; installing the exterior gypsum ceilings at the Community College of Philadelphia's new Business and Industry-Technology building; and applying spray-on fireproofing on a portion of the Linc.

"We work on projects that we can hit a home run or a triple," said Perryman, who takes pride in his work very seriously.

A native of Alabama who grew up in the tiny town of Evergreen, Perryman's father ran a small construction business building homes in the counties surrounding his hometown. The business was a success, but began to languish soon after his father passed away when he was 17 years old. During the following 10 years, Perryman, his two older brothers and mother kept the business "puttering along."

It was enough experience to plant the seed for Perryman to eventually form his own construction business in November 1998. Before reaching that point, he took time to learn the trade, giving him confidence in his work.

After receiving a degree in business administration from Auburn University, Perryman took a summer job with the state of Alabama on a trash truck. It was a brief stint that convinced him to move on to something else -- the construction business.

Perryman got a job with what is now known as Kellogg Brown & Root, a unit of Halliburton Co. of Texas. Perryman worked on a labor crew there, building a new pulp and paper mill for Union Camp, a division of International Paper. Perryman then received a promotion to become a subcontractor

coordinator, or someone who manages subcontractors on a construction job. Eventually, a series of promotions landed him in a supervisor position as the "eyes and ears" of a construction job.

Then, "as fate would have it," Blount Construction Co. was looking for an estimator who had industrial work experience. It was a position Perryman knew was for him.

Perryman spent nearly a decade with Blount, which is based in Marietta, Ga. He served as an area superintendent, overseeing a project in Michigan at the Detroit Regional Correctional Facilities. There he managed to save \$2.5 million by devising a cost reduction-control plan.

That work proved invaluable.

"It helped me put the pieces of a [construction] job together," he said. "It's the job on paper. It forced me to think about the nuts and bolts of a project."

His work took him to his home state and to Alaska, among others.

Philadelphia was just another town when he hired in 1989 as a superintendent with a development team that worked on constructing the Pennsylvania Convention Center. There he represented Kemrodco Development & Construction in the renovation of the Reading Terminal Train Shed. It was a task like no other. It entailed preserving the 100-year old facility as well as relocating more than 75 merchants during its construction.

One of the more fascinating aspects of his work there was discovering that a century after the train shed was constructed, it remained "100 percent plumb."

With his work at the convention center completed, Perryman decided to stay.

That's when he started his own business using \$10,000 of seed money culled from savings and retirement accounts. He got support from his brothers and mother, who gave him three P's of advice: pray, plan and proceed.

Perryman's first break came in building out a recording studio in the Germantown neighborhood. The \$75,000 job led to the easiest and least expensive marketing tool -- word of mouth -- that got Perryman his next job and a reputation for doing good work.

The challenges of running one's own business became apparent to Perryman. Most notably was learning how to be a good employer.

"I was more concerned about whether I could meet the responsibility of the people who need to work with me," Perryman said.

Committed to doing quality work, Perryman said experience has taught him to put a personal touch on his jobs to keep clients happy.

"It takes a little more time, but you get to know how to deliver what is right," he said.

It's likely something he learned from his father, whom he said was satisfied with his work when he could stand back, look at a project and smile.

"I don't know someone who works hard and is unemployed," he said.

When working with clients, he likes to guide them and their ideas and turn it into a reality.

"We help you build your vision," he said.

Always seeking out the next job, Perryman acknowledges it's tough to compete with big construction companies that have the ability to bond major projects easily. While his focus has been small projects, these big construction firms have formed their own "small project groups" that compete with companies such as Perryman's.

Despite this fact, Perryman's undeterred.

Five years from now, Perryman envisions his company making \$15 million in revenues with local name recognition and a fully developed construction team.

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