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CHRIS STANTON

2020 Chairman of the Board

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New Chairman Chris Stanton's Passion Is Preparing the Next Generation for Success

Our new Chairman, Chris Stanton, is Vice President, Preconstruction at McCownGordon Construction, a commercial general contractor headquartered in downtown Kansas City. He graduated from Kansas State University with a Bachelor's degree in Construction Science & Management in May 1993.

Chris joined the Builders' Board in 2017. He has been an officer and member of the Builders' Executive Board since 2018. He has also served on the Carpenters Negotiating Committee.

He and his wife Sheri, who is also a K-State graduate, have two children. Their son Alex is a freshman at K-State and their daughter Sydney is a junior at Blue Valley Southwest High School.

PLANNING FOR 2023

As Chairman, Chris will help lead the process of updating the Association's 2020 Vision Plan.

"In mid-2020, the board and staff will set their sights on developing an updated strategic plan that will take us through 2023," he commented. "We're continuing to work with Elisa Brewer Pratt, our outside consultant, on the next chapter of the Vision Plan drafted in 2017, the year Dirk Schafer was chairman." Elisa had been the liaison for all chapter executive directors with the AGC of America.

The plan is supported by three teams: 1) Best in Class; 2) Operate Like a Business; and 3) Sell Mission-Based Membership. "Providing value is key to retaining existing members and recruiting new ones," he stated.

Chris' relationship with The Builders' Association dates back to the earliest days of his construction career. "I started my career with Walton Construction in the mid '90s in Kansas City. I'd always go to the Builders' events.

"As an estimator, I'd talk to people on the phone or see them in the Plan Room, but I really got to connect with them on a personal level at the Holiday Party, the Annual Banquet, or other events hosted by the Builders', and that hasn't changed. I remember looking up to the chairman and the other board members I'd meet and thinking I would like to take on a leadership role someday."

Several years ago, said Chris, Brett Gordon, Founding Partner and Chairman of McCownGordon, introduced him to Don Greenwell, President of The Builders' Association. "I've really enjoyed working with Don," said Chris. "He knows so many people and they all know him, and it's not just in Kansas City but obviously across the state. He is also tapped into an incredible network across the country. The Builders' staff team does a great job for the Association and the AGC. I really respect them for what they've done and

how they've done it."

Chris said that a primary focus for his tenure as chairman will be the development of a Team of Peers whose mission will be to find ways to help the Association's member companies develop and grow. "Participants will meet on a regular basis to talk about their businesses, strategic planning initiatives, community involvement, and other key topics. They will also address specific industry issues such as workforce development," he commented.

Finding new ways to engage and develop the next generation of members and leaders is another important goal. Attendance by the Construction Leadership Council (CLC) Chair at our Builders' board meetings, in addition to the AGC Chapter board meetings, is one of the positive changes he cited.

"When you volunteer for a CLC or Builders' committee or join the Builders' or AGC board, you have the opportunity to enhance your personal and professional growth. You then have the opportunity to share what you've learned with others so that they can grow too," he stated.

Passing along what he has learned is important to Chris. When Alex was at Blue Valley Southwest, Chris spoke to his drafting class about what he did at work and how he prepares an estimate. He taught "Estimating Project Risk" at The Builders' Association's Estimating & Management Workshops in 2018.

"I've been at McCownGordon long enough to see a lot of my team members and co-workers grow in their careers, and I enjoy experiencing that growth with them. We've got to share what we've learned with the next generation for their benefit and the benefit of their companies," he stated.

FULL CIRCLE

Chris' academic and professional careers came full circle when McCownGordon was awarded the K-State Engineering Expansion project as Construction Manager at Risk in 2013. "As a graduate of K-State it was especially exciting to work on this project," he recalled. "Dave Fritchen, who had been one of my professors, was the School of Engineering's project coordinator, and I had a lot of respect for him."

Professor Fritchen had joined the K-State engineering faculty after a 21-year career as a commissioned officer in the U.S. Navy Civil Engineer Corps and Seabees.

"Beginning in 2013, several of us worked closely with Dave as we moved thru design and preconstruction. To be able to show what I had learned from him and use it on a real-world project was very gratifying."

The \$40 million Phase IV Expansion added approximately 108,600 square feet of instructional, research, and office space, and

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cover photo by Steve Wiberg

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was completed in late 2015.

“The addition attached to three existing buildings [Durland, Rathbone, and Fiedler], all built at different times and all requiring retrofitting of facades and building systems. Much of the work was performed while classes were in session. The team worked well together on the constructability details,” added Chris.

Chris begins his day at 3:45 a.m. “When the kids were young, I started getting up early to go to the gym so I could be home with my family in the evenings and attend our kids’ events,” he said. He has continued the same early workout routine. If he can’t get to the fitness center, he works out in the gym at McCownGordon’s new headquarters at 850 Main.

He became Vice President, Preconstruction in January 2019. Prior to that he was Vice President, Estimating. In his current role, Chris leads a team of 35 preconstruction managers, estimators, and risk managers in the Kansas City, Manhattan and Wichita offices.

The respective teams work with clients and architects during the design phase. “A majority of our work is negotiated. We submit a fee based on general conditions during early design. We work with the design team and the client through schematic design, design development, construction documents and typically a guaranteed maximum contract price. Then the team can begin building. Our team does a great job of working with our clients and architects to help them spend their money wisely.

“During preconstruction a job can go away at any time. So even though you’ve won the job, you must stay on top of your game to control costs and meet the client’s expectations at all times. If the client wants more program than they can afford, this will affect their ability to get financing. The project is not won until you’re actually building it.

“We feel negotiated work is a better way to

I’ve known Chris for nearly 30 years now. We were fraternity brothers at Kansas State University. When I think of Chris, three words come to mind: Integrity . . . Smart . . . Dedicated. Chris and I have worked together nearly our entire careers. He’s been instrumental in the success that we’ve had at McCownGordon over our 20-year history. He’s been a steady leader in our company throughout the many stages of our growth. He’s been adaptive and forward-thinking as our company has grown and evolved. I’m so proud that he’s taking on this leadership role with The Builders’ Association and representing our company in the industry. I’m proud to not only call Chris a colleague, but also a friend. I know he’ll continue to be a factor in our future growth.

Ramin Cherafat,

Chief Executive Officer, McCownGordon Construction

deliver a project than going out and hard bidding it. We can provide more value, cost options, and schedule development during preconstruction than we could if we were just giving a price.”

Chris also spreads his time among McCownGordon’s vertical markets. “We have a team that is responsible for healthcare and higher education, one that does K-12, and another that’s focused on the Kansas City market,” he commented.

Chris addressed McCownGordon’s preconstruction efforts on their new headquarters. “When we started, our plan was to work with the design team at Helix [Architecture + Design] to renovate the inside and move in. Helix suggested we take the skin off and make it more contemporary, add a third floor, and extend it out to the east so we’d be closer to the curb line and street car. They suggested we approach the city a little bit more – almost like we’re reaching out to it.

“Everyone was blown away with the concept. We worked with Helix to be sure it was something we could afford,” he continued. “Once construction started, we talked about little changes. It gave me a different insight into how our clients operate and how, once construction starts, they will start seeing little

things they want to tweak to make the building better for their associates.”

McCownGordon’s current reach extends to Aberdeen, South Dakota, where they are working on Northern State University Regional Sports Complex. Groundbreaking on Phase I of the project, a joint venture with Quest Construction (which is based in Aberdeen), was in October 2019.

Chris and his team are working on a bond issue for the Lee’s Summit R-7 School District. The \$80 million package includes a new middle school, renovation of three middle schools, and renovations as well as construction of softball diamonds at the high school. Another new project is the VA Outpatient Clinic in Johnson County, a 32,000 square foot facility off I-35 and South Lake. This project is in the design phase.

He has been working on many other projects but those are some of the projects they have recently won, he noted.

He has had a longstanding relationship with Pat McCown, Founding Partner and Retired CEO of McCownGordon; Brett Gordon; and Ramin Cherafat, CEO. McCownGordon was founded in 1999 and Chris joined the company in 2000. Chris and Ramin were at K-State together and were members of the same fraternity, Phi Delta Theta.

“At company meetings, Pat would always close with the core values of the company:

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Chris Stanton (in background above and at right) teaches a full “Estimating Project Risk” class at The Builders’ Association’s Estimating & Management Workshops at Bartle Hall on September 19, 2018.



2020 Chairman

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Integrity, Performance and Relationships. Then he would tell a real-world story about a recent experience that exemplified one of those values,” commented Chris. “Ask anyone in the company what the core values are and what they mean, and they will tell you.”

Chris described an experience that illustrated Pat’s adherence to these values. “Early on at the company I made a mistake on a project by not putting in some money that we needed for the job. I went into the meeting thinking I may not be here tomorrow. I was so thankful when Pat worked through the problem calmly and approached it as a learning moment. I’ve taken that same approach with my own team.

“We will sit down, review what happened, ask why it happened, figure out how to fix it, and determine how to prevent it from happening again,” he added.

Chris’ parents are from Iowa. His father worked for John Deere, a manufacturer of agricultural and other equipment headquartered in the Quad City of Moline, Illinois. “Growing up we moved around a few times, from Davenport [Iowa] to Ottumwa [Iowa] and then to Farmington, Missouri, where my Dad was a territory manager. [Farmington is about 75 miles southwest of St. Louis.] He worked for the corporate side of John Deere selling equipment to the dealerships, which were individually owned.”

Chris was born in Davenport but grew up in Farmington. When he was still in grade school, his father was transferred by John Deere to Kansas City to sell aftermarket parts to dealers. “Dad and several others at Deere developed a team they called Harvest Corps. Basically he and his team would stock two or three tractor semi-trailers with parts and they would service the custom cutters of wheat from Texas all the way up into Montana to make sure the equipment was always up and running. He always talked about doing your best. Harvest Corps was one of the things that they could do their best to service their clients.”

Chris’ parents moved to Stilwell, an unincorporated community in Johnson County, Kansas, in 1980. “There weren’t many stop lights out there like you have now,” he said. He fondly remembers driving four wheelers with his friends around the open countryside.

His mother was a stay-at-home mom when he and his older sister were growing up. When he entered high school, she went to UMKC and graduated with a B.A. in Elementary Education. She went on to teach fifth grade at LEMS (Louisburg Elementary School) in Louisburg, Kansas.

He was inspired by his parents’ example. “My dad wasn’t a college graduate and mom went back to college later in life. They showed me how a strong work ethic pays off and that anything is possible.”

He also finds inspiration in the example of his immediate family. “Sheri is Assistant Director of Finance at Special Olympics

Kansas. Alex is doing well at K-State and Sydney, who is a cheerleader and is involved in other high school activities, just went on a tour of the University of Arkansas campus. The kids are getting ready for their next step in life.”

During the summers while in high school, Chris would mow lawns for spending money and to buy his own car. He enjoyed buying and selling cars and recalls having four or five cars through high school and college. His first car was his favorite: a 1972 Monte Carlo. “It had a big long nose and was bright yellow. You could see it coming a mile away,” he laughed.

Chris played offensive and defensive tackle on his Blue Valley High School football team. After graduating in 1989, he followed in his sister’s footsteps by going to K-State where, after taking a variety of construction-related courses, he settled on Construction Science as a major. His sister, who is three years older and his only sibling, earned her B.S. degree in Special Education at K-State. Chris’ brother-in-law earned his degree in Milling Science and Management at K-State, and the couple also have two boys at K-State, rounding out the family of Powercats.

VOLUNTEER SERVICE

Chris was a member of the Board of Directors of the U.S. Green Building Council’s Central Plains Chapter from 2012 to 2014. A non-profit organization, the USGBC promotes sustainability in building design, construction, and operations.

He has also been actively involved in Scouting. When Alex was a Cub Scout, Chris was Den Leader of Alex’s Den. Alex was a recipient of the Arrow of Light Award, the highest rank in Cub Scouting. Earning this rank prepares a Cub Scout to become a Boy Scout.

Chris was an Assistant Scout Master of Alex’s 75-member Scout Troop. As an active member of the Boy Scouts Heart of America Council, Chris was also a Committee Member and a Merit Badge Counselor. He had a passion for assisting in the development and progression of Scouts toward the rank of Eagle Scout.

As an Assistant Scout Master, Chris would join Alex when he attended summer camp at the H. Roe Bartle Scout Reservation in Osceola, Missouri. Chris described the hike from the reservation to Scott’s Iconium Store for Peach Nehi floats as a Boy Scout “rite of passage.”

“Once I started camping with Alex I thought it was a blast,” said Chris. “It’s something I still love doing to this day. Alex really enjoyed the Boy Scouts. He was part of a group of five or six Blue Valley Southwest students who all earned their Eagle Scout. Some of them are going to school together at K-State. He has made a lot of friendships, and I have as well with the dads.”

Chris was on hand when The Builders’ Association received the prestigious Community/Labor Partner Award at the George Meany and Community/Labor Partner Awards Dinner on August 22, 2019. The award was presented by the Boy Scouts Heart of America Council.

A “CHANCE” ENCOUNTER

Chris and Sheri met during the summer of 1992, before their senior year at K-State. The

occasion was a party in Manhattan being thrown by a mutual friend. Sheri was working in housewares at Waters True Value Hardware Store in Manhattan at the time. After the party, Chris decided to go shopping there and “just happened to run into her,” he smiled. The rest is history.

“I took her to see ‘Captain Ron,’ which was the first movie we saw together,” he recalled. The comedy stars Martin Short and Kurt Russell. “Captain Ron was a masterpiece,” he added with a laugh.

The couple continued their courtship while Chris, right out of school, was working for a general contractor in San Angelo, a city in west Texas. “We had job sites from San Angelo over to Midland and Odessa. The water district had built a lake and we had won a bid to build the pump stations. We were building seven pump stations to meet the area’s water needs. I was a project engineer. Shortly after that I moved back to Kansas City and started working for Walton Construction,” he recalled.

The Stantons enjoy traveling together as a family. “Right now Sydney is committed to cheerleading, but when we can we might drive down to Florida or over to Colorado for a family vacation. A couple years ago we were fortunate to go to Hawaii. We started off at Maui, which was beautiful and very relaxing, before going on to Honolulu.”

“One of our favorite family traditions is Sunday night dinner at our house, just the four of us,” said Chris. The tradition includes watching America’s Funniest Home Videos on TV. “We started when the kids were young, and Alex still joins us when he’s in town.” The Stantons welcomed a fifth member to the family last summer when they adopted a Silver Lab puppy they named Zoey.

Chris enjoys cooking. He especially enjoys preparing Thanksgiving dinner for his family. On camping trips with the Boy Scouts, he would bake a triple chocolate cake in the Dutch oven. He also enjoys barbecuing and smoking meats, although he hasn’t entered any cook-offs. “I’ve got a few more years of development,” he commented.

PAYING TRIBUTE

Chris paid tribute to Darin Heyen, his predecessor as Chairman. “Darin served on the Kansas City Chapter, AGC Board for 14 years, including two years as President. He went on to join the Builders’ Board in 2018 and is now our Immediate Past Chairman. That’s 17 years of service on the two boards – a remarkable tribute to his leadership and commitment.

“I’ve enjoyed working with Darin and look forward to his being an ongoing resource. Sheri and I have also enjoyed getting to know his wife Lauren at the retreats. He approaches things in a very thoughtful way, and with his background as a practicing architect brings a broad mindset and perspective to the building industry. I was also on the board when Shawn Burnum and Dirk Schafer were Chairmen before Darin, and while all of them have their own leadership styles, each has great qualities. As a member of the board I’ve been very fortunate to work with them professionally and get to know them personally.” ▲