



Building Community





Written by Claire Suttles

L&L Builders got its start in 1960 as a residential masonry company operating under the name Larry Book Contracting. Business boomed and the company quickly expanded into the commercial sector and evolved into a merit-shop general contracting firm.

Larry's younger brother Lonnie joined the team and the business incorporated as L&L Builders Company in 1979. Today, the Sioux City-based construction firm averages over \$25,000,000 of completed work annually and operates throughout Iowa, Minnesota, Nebraska, and South Dakota.

The Book brothers built trust within the community and established strong relationships, forming a foundation that has brought the company lasting success. "Years ago, [they] would do projects on a handshake or do contracts on a handshake in some instances," says Chief Financial Officer John Lee. "So I think a lot of it goes back to them and their relationships in the area."

Today, the team continues to put great care into cultivating relationships. Subcontractors are considered part of the L&L Builders family. "When they are assigned to a project and we're working on the project together, they are part of the team," says Field Manager & Safety Director Jim Mauer. "We're all here to get the job done and get it done successfully and hopefully come out and make a dollar."

Vice President and General Manager Joel Jarman adds, "they really are partners... and they need to be treated accordingly."

The company's commitment to subcontractors requires ongoing effort, but yields great rewards. "If you have issues or concerns, try and work through them for the benefit of everybody so you can build relationships," Lee says. "It's a small marketplace here; we know we're going to be working with them, and we want to work with them, so we try very hard to communicate and work through any concerns." ►►





▶ Client relationships are also a top priority. “Relationship building with clients is a big part of our organization as well,” Jarman says. “We have a lot of clients that we’ve done multiple projects with and, you know, it’s all about reputation. Are you getting the job done on time? Are you getting it done within the budget and is the quality there to stand for a long time? And you know you can do a far better job when you work closely with a client and subcontractors.”

Larry and Lonnie Book set the precedent that L&L Builders should be active in the community and not just on the jobsite. Lee remembers that when he joined the company nearly 25 years ago, Larry Book made community service a condition of his employment. Book told the new recruit, “you will join a service organization and you will give your time.” He believed very, very sincerely in that.”



“They always wanted the executives, the leaders, the people that were involved in the organization to be out and serving on boards [and in] service organizations, and that continues today,” says Jarman. “We’re not just about making money; we’re about serving the community with our time and talents.”

Giving back to the community is a win-win that benefits both the company and the people served. “It gets your name out and gets your face out and gets the company name out,” Lee says.



Jarman discovered these benefits firsthand when he moved to Sioux City. “That really helped me network very fast,” he says. “There were different people on different boards that I got connected with and those connections continued on. You familiarize yourself with the city a lot quicker and you get to meet some of the decision makers.”

L&L Builders still believes in volunteering time and energy to service organizations. This is particularly important today because membership in many service organizations is dwindling. “That’s a culture that was really driven by Larry Book back in the day,” Jarman says. “And it’s really continued forward here 60 years later, which is really a great thing because, quite honestly, these services organizations are really dying out. [Companies] don’t want to support them with the time and talents of their people because it is time consuming.” As a result, service organizations “are aging out. It is an aging group of people and it’s a smaller group of people just because companies do not support them like they should.”



L&L Builders has always promoted certain key values within the company. Recently, the team decided it was time to make these values official. They formed a committee of employees who work in the field and the office, hired an outside firm for creative support, and worked together to develop an official set



of company values. The committee created the catchy acronym SCRIPT, which stands for Safety, Communication, Respect, Integrity, Passion, and Trust. “We see those as key values to run a successful organization,” says Jarman.

L&L Builders has also made a new commitment to education in order to maintain success. “Education is probably the key foundation of any organization,” Mauer says. Education is particularly critical in today’s construction industry as companies struggle with ongoing labor shortages. “We came to the conclusion we can’t find new people with the talent out there,” he says. So the company invests in the employees they already have on board. “We take the time to train them and develop them.” In the past, L&L Builders relied on on-the-job training; but in the current, fast-paced work environment, Mauer says there simply isn’t the opportunity that there used to be. “With today’s construction and schedules, it’s almost impossible to sit down and teach people on the job site because we’ve got to get the jobs done.”

A crucial part of the company’s education initiative is to prepare employees for leadership and management positions so they are fully prepared for promotion. “Our people have great skills on the job – technical skills – but what they don’t have is the soft skills,” Jarman says. L&L Builders partnered with Western Iowa Tech Community College to provide a 12-week course to teach newly promoted supervisors, superintendents, and foremen the soft skills they need to succeed in management.

Indeed, the team would like to promote every employee. “We’re trying to build our bench with our personnel here,” Mauer says. “We all need laborers but, at the end of the day, two years from now, I don’t want them just being a laborer. I want them to

move up to an apprentice, to a finisher program, hopefully up to foreman. So we keep pushing the envelope and driving them to have a successful career here in L&L Builders.” Mauer is a prime example of how L&L Builders utilizes talent by promoting from within. He was promoted to Field Manager & Safety Director after working for over 20 years as a superintendent. “He knows what it takes to run a project,” Jarman says.

Now it is Mauer’s job to help others move up within the company. “We brought him in the office to be a conduit to our people and to grow the bench, so to speak, to create a career path for individuals,” Jarman explains. Both the employee and the company come out ahead. “Everybody wants a career path,” Jarman points out. “Everybody wants to develop themselves.”

The team is eager to keep the company going into the next generation, despite the challenges faced industry-wide with recruiting new people. “It’s an aging group,” Jarman says. “We’re working hard. We’re doing a lot of career development with the high schools here.” Last year, the company helped launch a career fair to educate students about the benefits of a career in construction. “The tech schools and the high schools have really jumped on board with that,” Jarman says. The efforts have paid off and the leadership team has brought young talent with degrees in construction management on board to eventually take their place.

“We want to be able to say when we retire here, and we’re in our easy chairs or we’re in our rockers and we see an L&L Builders truck go by, that we were part of keeping that organization going,” Jarman says. “Keep building for the future. That’s our tagline.” ■



2205 4th St, Sioux City, IA 51101 | P: 712-255-0657

www.llbuilders.com

