

Ben Burgess

Tampa, Florida



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Learn about Florida Entrepreneur Ben Burgess:

Ben Burgess, Founder and Managing Member of Burgess Civil, LLC, first got the construction bug at the age of 15 when his dad helped build the family's house in Charlotte, NC. His interest in construction along with a burgeoning interest in entrepreneurship, partly fueled by a friend's dad who was an entrepreneur, would guide many of Burgess' decisions starting in high school and continuing today as the owner of one of the premier civil contracting firms in the Tampa Bay area. Burgess shared his journey, some of the challenges he faced along the way and what he's doing to position Burgess Civil to capitalize on future growth in the commercial, residential and public sectors.

"After graduating from North Carolina State University with a degree in Civil Engineering, I worked for two different contractors in North Carolina

and Jacksonville," he said. "While working in Jacksonville I went back to school and got my MBA at the University of Florida. It was right after the recession when construction was slow, so it was a good time to go back to school. In 2012, I moved to Tampa to work for a different contractor for two years before going off on my own. It wasn't easy to take the plunge. I really liked the company I worked for, but my wife was very encouraging. She's the risk taker. She said go for it. I'm not sure if I would have done it without my wife."

From Startup to Second-Stage

Since June of 2014, when Burgess Civil was officially founded, until now, labor shortage has been one of Burgess' biggest challenges. That shortage includes skilled and unskilled labor. According to Burgess, people working in the elements are a dying breed.

"In this industry, the Baby Boomers are cycling out," he said. "My business is very blue collar. In fact, about 50 of our 60 employees are blue collar employees. Some of the younger generations don't have the same work ethic as those that are phasing out and there's really no one else in-between. We've actually been somewhat limited in our growth because we're not able to find the right people."

Nevertheless, Burgess Civil, which focuses on horizontal construction and not vertical construction, continues to grow despite their HR challenges. As a civil contracting firm, they handle road building, site grading and anything underground including sewer, drainage and water pipes for General Contractors, land developers and home builders. Their value add comes down to the level of professionalism they bring to their projects and their willingness to do more complicated than bigger

companies typically avoid.

"It's really cool to go to a job-site and see what you've been able to create," he said. "I'm also very passionate about creating opportunities for my employees. I want to help them realize the opportunities around them and give them a great place to work. I've had some good level-headed mentors along the way and it's important to me that I don't lose sight of what it's like to be an employee."

When it comes to company culture, Burgess described the environment as one that is fast growing but still has a family feel. He wants to be a company that's not blinded by growth and revenue. He drives home with his blue-collar employees the fact that they will know who the owner of the company is and who they are working for. Quality of life is important and so are three things that Burgess discusses at new hire orientation.

A Focus on Culture Drives Growth

"We talk about focusing on three things," he said. "Attention to detail, being a true partner and doing what's best for the customer to encourage repeat business and then delivering on our promises. We've been in the Tampa Bay Business Journal Fast 50 for the past two years. That's a real testament to our culture."

In terms of philanthropic activities, Burgess Civil is very involved in the Tampa Bay Pig Jig, an annual fundraiser event that benefits the NephCure Kidney International, the only non-profit organization committed to supporting research, improving treatment and finding a cure for the debilitating kidney disease, FSGS (Focal Segmental Glomerulosclerosis) and Nephrotic Syndrome. On a personal level,

Burgess has done presentations about career paths in site construction for The University of Florida's Construction Management Program and for the Civil Engineering Program at The University of South Florida.

What it Means to Be a Florida Companies to Watch Honoree

"It certainly gives us some positive marketing material that we can use," he said. "Between our recognition in the Tampa Bay Business Journal's Fast 50 and this honor, we'll use the two to take to our customers and show that we're legitimate. We're growing our business and trying to do it the right way. Overall, we are a fast-moving entrepreneurial-based business with a tremendous amount of professionalism.

In terms of why we were selected, I think it's partly due to good market timing. I paid close attention to economic cycles and timed it very well.

A lot of our growth is market driven. It's been a very hot market for development. It's partly right place right time and partly due to the emphasis we place on building a business the right way."

Looking ahead, Burgess is focused on diversifying his business by getting into public work. As Burgess shared, commercial follows residential, but government work is always there. It's steadier work as the economy fluctuates. He's also focused on recruiting a younger workforce and showing the younger generation that it's possible to make a good living, without taking on a lot of debt, if they're willing to work a blue-collar job.

Advice For Aspiring Entrepreneurs

What advice does Burgess have for aspiring entrepreneurs? "Focus on

trying to master a trade first," he said. "Figure out how to do a specific job really well. Most businesses start because someone happens to be really good at something and they eventually realize they can take those skills and do that job better on their own. You also need to be able to add value. I knew I could add value for my customers by going off on my own."

Awards and Recognition

