

Brian Walsh

Lake Mary, Florida



[The Collage Companies](#)

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Learn about Florida Entrepreneur Brian Walsh:

From a very early age, Brian Walsh, Founder, President and CEO of The Collage Companies, knew he wanted to be an architect and a builder. As a kid, he would trace over floor plans in the Sunday newspaper and redesign houses. After visiting The University of Miami's School of Architecture, while on a family trip to Miami Beach, Walsh fell in love with the school and decided to attend college at UM. He graduated in the early 80s with a degree in architecture and got a job with an architectural firm in Miami. Not long after, Walsh had a revelation.

"While working at that firm, I realized I didn't want to sit in an office and just draw all day long," he said. "I loved the entire building process, including design and construction. However, back then, it wasn't common for a firm to do both. After two years in Miami, I was ready for

a new challenge and a new opportunity."

Walsh connected with a college roommate and moved to Orlando. It was there that The Collage Companies was founded in 1982. Walsh said that, at the time, he was too young and foolish to be nervous. He always had an adventurous streak and never doubted his abilities. Walsh shared the experience of landing their first client and some of the early challenges they faced as a unique company in a very traditional industry.

From startup to second-stage

"My first client was a guy that worked for an accounting firm who always had a dream to open his own restaurant, so we worked together in the evenings for several weeks and ending up designing and build a restaurant on Colonial drive in downtown Orlando," he said. "That was our first project. The three of us landed more projects and worked together for a couple years until I had a major change in my life. I became a born again Christian and with it, came a change to how I wanted to run the business. We all ended up going our separate ways and I continued down the path of growing a design and build company. This approach wasn't common back then, but I was committed to it. Even though we were a unique company, we were competing against much stronger firms with more history and experience. We were under-capitalized, under-staffed and I wore every hat imaginable. Looking back, I was pretty naive to all the challenges."

Despite the uniqueness of the company, and the challenges that come with having to establish your place in the market, Walsh pressed on and continued to win projects and build a solid reputation. Walsh shared that the phrase, 'from concept to completion', accurately describes The

Collage Companies. They understand every aspect of the process from land acquisition, design and construction to financing the project and how to deal with regulatory hurdles. They have a firm grip on the marketplace and, as Walsh pointed out, they understand their client's end game.

"We've worked in many different sectors, but we really have specific expertise with churches and schools," he said. "We know the finances and codes needed to get these projects in place, but we also understand liturgical design and the functional needs of a church to become like a community center ". We bring a certain level of expertise that really benefits our clients. We're also extremely owner-friendly. We try hard to be an extension of who they are and what they need. We don't view ourselves as a commodity. We're not in this to be the cheap guy. In the long run, that doesn't benefit anyone. In our industry like many others, it is true that you get what you pay for. There's a certain value placed on the expertise that we bring to the table, but that ends up saving clients' money in the long-run."

The Collage Companies' workforce has grown by 10% per year over the last couple of years. Walsh shared that the culture is very family focused. The management and leadership team are open and transparent. As such, they maintain an open-door policy with a focus on communication. They also understand the importance of work/life balance and giving their employees some flexibility with their schedules.

Notable community contributions

Philanthropy and community involvement are a big part of The Collage Companies' corporate fabric. Walsh shared some of the ways they give

back. "Our mission statement for the past 25 years revolves around giving back to the community," he said. "We focus on building projects that strengthen the foundation and fabric of our community. It's what we're all about. In the last couple of years, we've worked with Harbor House, a home for domestic violence victims, Shepherd's Hope, an organization that provides medical services to those in need and Teen Challenge in Sanford, a treatment center for young people dealing with substance abuse. We have an annual event called, 'Party with a Purpose'. At the last event, we raised \$35,000 for Shepherd's Hope. We're also working with FL Citrus Sports on a project near Camping World Stadium to help revitalize a local neighborhood and raising funds for a new park, like Lake Eola in Downtown Orlando, but on the west side of Interstate 4."

What it means to be a Florida Companies to Watch Honoree

"It's a great honor for me and the entire company to be recognized for what we love to do and believe in," he said. "To have it acknowledged supports and reinforces what we're doing. There are a lot of great companies out there. To be in that group is an honor."

In terms of why we were selected, I think it has to do with the unique approach we've taken in an industry that is traditional and rigid. Construction is slow to change. Our approach to being client-centric is one we feel good about and hopefully that was also recognized. We truly are a service business and have worked hard to become allies to our clients. It's who we are. It's also worth noting that we are who we are because of the relationships we have had with people like Ken LaRoe, Chairman and Founder of First Green Bank, a 2013 Florida Companies to

Watch Honoree who also nominated us for this award. We have done work for Ken and very much respect his positive impact on the community."

Looking ahead, Walsh shared that if the company stays focused on what they do best, that there's a big upside for the foreseeable future. Certainly, there are day to day challenges, but their services are needed, and demand is increasing. Walsh was also excited to share that they recently filed paperwork to establish an Employee Stock Ownership Plan (ESOP). It's an exciting milestone for The Collage Companies and one that falls in line with their corporate culture.

Advice for aspiring entrepreneurs

Walsh offers up some great advice for aspiring entrepreneurs. "You can be an entrepreneur in one of two ways," he said. "Either you're driven to do it or you're called to do it. If you're driven to do it, make sure you're doing it for the right reasons. If you're called to do it, make sure you know why. Once you do that and you're ready to take the plunge, approach it without a plan B. Knowing there's a safety net will not help you. Stay hyper focused and remember, it's important to go slow in order to go fast. Take the time to create a detailed business plan or roadmap for your mission. Spend enough time on researching your industry, your unique approach to your industry, and what it takes to be successful. Also remember that there will always be road blocks, just don't get discouraged. Stay focused."

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