



Living legacies

Attendees discuss their industry beginnings

They are skilled. Motivated. Passionate. Driven. In an industry where deadlines, budgets and building partnerships are critical, commercial construction professionals are a different and special breed.

So, how did they get here? What paths did they take to be the caretakers of what happens in our industry? During our roundtable discussions at our 2019 Commercial Construction & Renovation Retreat, attendees shared their stories on how they entered the industry.

2019
COMMERCIAL
CONSTRUCTION
& RENOVATION
RETREAT

The three-day event, sponsored by *Commercial Construction & Renovation* magazine, was held Sept. 26-29 at The Hu Hotel in the heart of downtown Memphis. The retreat featured a series of networking events and roundtable discussions designed to bring together thought leaders from the retail, restaurant, hospitality and other commercial sectors.

On the following pages is the final installment of our roundtable discussion. You can also read the story online at www.ccr-mag.com.



Vinny Catullo
Director of Marketing
& Sales



Darrel Chaney
Business Development



Kevin Fleming
VP of Business
Development



Megan Haggerty
Founder



Stephen Hekman
VP Retail Services



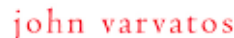
Tim Hill
Executive VP,
Business Development



Brandon Ingram
Real Estate Associate



Dedrick Kirkem
Facilities Manager



Eric Korth
Retail Facilities
Manager



Abram Lueders
Planning &
Development Analyst



Skip Mason
Director of Sales,
National Accounts



Nate McNeil
Director of
Retail Operations



Michael Morelli
Director of Business
Development



Randy Pannell
Managing Executive



Elizabeth Parker
Facility Designer



Christine Smith
Construction Coordinator



Russell Williams
Manager of Design
& Production



Nicole Young
Business Development



CCR: Tell us your story. How did you get into the industry?

Abram Lueders, Downtown Memphis Commission: I moved from Hawaii to the far suburbs of Omaha, Nebraska with my brother when I was 17. I didn't have my driver's license, so I spent a lot of time walking along those highways in a completely suburban area. It made me think a lot about the built environment and city use. Why were there no sidewalks, and things like that. I read a lot about cities, downtown areas and historic development patterns, things like that. I read the book, "The Death and Life of Great American Cities" by Jane Jacobs. The idea of where we live and how we create these places really appealed to me.



I ended up getting a four-year degree in broadcasting and worked for a couple of years in public broadcasting. Then I went to Georgia Tech to get my master's in city and regional planning, where I ended up getting interested in real estate development and finance. I took some courses in that. I read about pro formas. When I finished grad school, I was hired by the Downtown Memphis Commission doing the things I wanted to do. I get to work in the public sector for the public good. I get to work with developers, with numbers and data. It has been a really fun journey.

Stephen Hekman, Kingsmen Projects: Initially, I didn't want to get into construction or fixtures. I was going to get into advertising and work in branding, but it just seemed like those jobs didn't pay very well. I ended up

landing a job working for CPI (Corporate Property Investors) right out of college. I worked the Burlington Mall when they raised the second level, and I was thrown into this project where they brought in 65 retailers all at the same time. It just so happened that I knew some people and got the job.

That was my developer exposure. And then the market started to turn in 1990. I went back to California and helped open about 400 stores for a blind retailer called "Three-Day Blinds," all the way to Texas and Arkansas. We didn't have cellphones back then, just SkyPagers and fax machines.

The market turned again in 1996, and I went to work for a fixture fabricator in New Mexico. That's where I started getting into the fixture business—with a British-owned company. The first contract was with Rubio's restaurants. Next was Bugle Boy, followed by Hot Topic, where we did 600 stores.

Sketchers was another brand along those lines I worked with. I owe a lot to them. It was the first brand I worked overseas with, doing stores in Europe. Kingsman ended up getting my name, so that is where that relationship started. So while I am not really doing advertising, I am working with and learning about brands. That's the fun part of the business—the part I am passionate about. The brand is the story. It is about telling that story.

Meghan Haggerty, Legacy Capital Investment: I've always been extremely interested in problem solving, statistics and stability. After I lost my stepfather when I was in high school, I sat down and thought, "In the end, where do I want to be? What do I want to be able to say that I accomplished?" I always knew that I wanted to build a legacy. From then on, I began looking for opportunities to grow. I went to college a year early and studied mechanical engineering. I quickly realized in college that the problem solving mindset I developed while studying engineering could be applicable in many other areas aside from engineering.

Every time I went to New York City and saw the way the buildings were built, I found it fascinating. I always loved the idea of physical assets that produced real value—both for the investors and the end users. I ended up leaving college to pursue real estate. I read every book I could get my hands on—listened to every audio book—took every class. The more I learned, the more I realized it is who you know and not what you know. So I began networking.

Skip Mason, FloorMax USA:
I got started in the flooring industry in 1995. I didn't have any flooring experience and I was asked to run a retail outlet. I learned a lot by trial and error.

I truly believe that people will elevate you to places you want to be. I spent a lot of time and effort networking. I was fortunate enough to meet some executives and senior members from top real estate firms. They invested with me early on, not just monetarily. They took me under their wings and showed me what it looked like to build a company, and buy and run deals. I have been working with them and a lot of other amazing people to purchase real estate.

There is something I have been really passionately following, something I believe is as recession-resilient as possible—affordable housing. It is the part of commercial real estate that doesn't really get talked about much.

That being said, this is a journey of continuing to develop and expand, putting myself around people who are brilliant. Expansion is the name of the game—surrounding myself with people who have a solid track record. It's a rinse and repeat until I am the best.

Vinny Catullo, CDO Group: I started out of college with Legends Hospitality. It was a newly formed partnership between the New York Yankees and Dallas Cowboys and I was part of their operations team. I helped open the new Yankee Stadium and I worked at Cowboys Stadium when it first opened as well. After that, I relocated to North Carolina and I opened up another baseball stadium in Winston-Salem.

I was kind of like the firefighter who would go wherever there was an issue at a stadium on the operations side of food and beverage and work toward fixing it. It usually was with our special events, suite or high-end services. It got to a point where I wanted to take a step toward career growth, which led me to enter the growing healthcare industry as a consultant. That was very different but allowed to focus on training, developing, and growing a team which ultimately led me to CDO Group.



**Tim Hill,
The Beam Team:**
I started less than 47 years ago as a merchandizer doing resets with fixtures and merchandise three or four decades ago. I have worked my way up. Over the years, I have lived in Grand Rapids, Michigan, Cleveland, Boston, and now Chicago.



At CDO, I am able to be hands-on with our culture, growth, and establishing our processes to better serve our partners. It has allowed me to utilize everything I have learned throughout my career which was what I really wanted.

Russell Williams, Skechers: I was going back to school to get my master's in healthcare and working part-time at Belk. I did not know this at the time, but the store had never made its numbers (in the Tommy Hilfiger department) before I went to work there. I worked in the department for maybe like six months. Somebody at the Tommy



Hilfiger corporate office asked at a meeting what was going on with the store. It ended up doubling its sales goal during the first six months I worked there. There was not a huge volume, but this store had never made its numbers before.

Somebody at Tommy Hilfiger called the store and asked how we did it. They told them there was this new kid working in the department at night. A month later someone from Tommy Hilfiger flew down to see me. A few weeks later, they invited me to New York to interview for a job. They interviewed me on Friday, and I moved two weeks later. After Tommy Hilfiger, I went to GUESS?, which moved me to move to LA. I said no. After a brutal New York winter, I told them I'd be there in a month.

After my dad got sick, I started teaching at a fashion school so I could have a more flexible schedule. When my dad passed away, I joined Skechers and have been here for three years.

Kevin Fleming, Quality Equipment Management:

I recently took on a new challenge with Quality Equipment Management (QEM). The company specializes in providing construction project equipment, e.g., open top dumpsters, temporary storage containers, lift equipment, portable restroom facilities and office trailers.

I had spent the past three years working on the GC side of the business, selling construction and installations services. Now I'm focused on the equipment side. Prior to that, I came out of the flooring industry, where I worked for seven years promoting a leading national brand of carpet with a major home improvement retailer.

I have spent most of my career calling on the large home improvement retailers, either selling a product as a manufacturer or as a manufacturer's rep. I was the conduit between the manufacturer and the home center. I gained critical experience by working in the stores performing a lot of hands-on merchandising of product, moving things around on the shelves to ensure that the vendors we were representing were well represented inside the store.

I've been in an account management/business development role throughout my career, working with four or five companies

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over the years. I love what I'm doing now and find fulfillment in hunting new opportunity to apply our company's vision and creating value for our clients.

Randy Pannell, Converge Consultants:

I've been either in the architectural or construction business my entire working career, which spans 47 years. I started when I was 17. I started as a draftsman when I was 17, back when they used pencils and paper, protractors and stuff like that. I worked at a handful of different companies, including Red Lobster, where I was a design manager there.

When I moved to the construction side, I went to work for McCrory Stores, the Melville Company out of Rye, New York, and Saks, where I stayed for 21 years. The retail stuff is hard to get out of your system—it's definitely a passion. And it will be for at least a few more years, servicing the retail, especially on the luxury retail side of the business.

Mike Morelli, Signage Solutions: I have been in the sign business since 1986, so it has been a bit of a journey. I got into the sign business because of my love for art and had to start at the bottom basically sweeping floors, coating out boards and pouncing patterns. I moved up from there until I was able to start swinging a brush and hand-painting signs working under some exceptional talent.

This was before computers and vinyl, when your ability was based on your talent and creativity. We never had routers or anything like that. We'd make a paper pattern by hand, put it on the aluminum, cut it out with a jigsaw, and welded the returns holding them together with magnets. It was a cumbersome process but at the time no one knew any different. I have seen the entire industry morph into something incredible. Production time, due to modern fabrication techniques, has increased client expectations.

Today, everything's pre-coated. Neon is becoming a thing of the past and illuminated signage is all LED. Everything is lightweight, so it's a snap to get it done. I morphed into the sales vertical and really fell in love with that part of it. This is what I really enjoy,



Elizabeth Parker, Quest Workspaces and Interior Designed Spaces: I actually wanted to be a fashion designer when I was younger. My mother caught me cutting up her shammy for the car.



building relationships—that feeling of accomplishment when a project is completed on time and within budget. Having the knowledge and experience helps me become more of a partner for sign programs. Everyone wants the same outcome and the only way to do that successfully is to work as a cohesive team with your clients. I have to exceed expectations every day.

Christine Smith, Cedar Realty Trust: I was a buyer for Anne Klein Factory Stores very early in my career, shortly after college. I transitioned over to store development with that firm, and found my niche. From there, I went to work for a couple of general contractors who did retail work nationwide, in project management.

I was then fortunate enough to work for two different retailers (A.C. Moore and Spencer Gifts) in project management and store development. Today, I am in project management and development for a REIT. So I have virtually seen all sides of this industry; working as the

**Meghan Haggerty,
Legacy Capital
Investment:**
**This is a journey of
continuing to develop
and expand, putting
myself around people
who are brilliant.
Expansion is the
name of the game—
surrounding myself
with people who
have a solid track
record. It's a rinse
and repeat until
I am the best.**

general contractor, the retailer or tenant, and now the landlord/developer.

Eric Korth, Cole Haan: I started off with a really bad skiing problem. That's all I wanted to do, so when I decided college wasn't for me, and I could ski, I said to my now wife, "Hey, why don't we go out to Colorado or Wyoming? I'm good enough to get someone's attention, and I'm dumb enough to try anything. I could probably get sponsored if we moved out West." She wanted nothing to do with moving out west. So I stayed local and went to work for my family business. At the time, my wife was still in school, and I was mad as hell that we were still paying rent.

Due to the nature of our business, I was working every weekend and I had Tuesdays and Wednesdays off. I made a pact with myself to work seven days a week for one full year. I worked for a real estate company on Tuesdays and Wednesdays so I could save enough money to buy a home. After a year, the real estate company





Darrel Chaney, Prime Retail Services: Think Prime Retail Services is one of the greatest stories to tell in our industry. I'm proud to say I helped start the company and still have the opportunity to represent them.



approached me with the idea to work for them full time. So I did. My tenure with the RE company coincided with the recession of 2008. It was a real tough time to work for a real estate company. They were handing out pink slips a lot at the end of each quarter. I wasn't sure what I was going to do.

I applied for the job at Starbucks as a facility service manager for the Boston market. At the time, it was the No. 5 market in the US. My then boss didn't think I had what it took to be successful with such a level of visibility, and she passed on me. At the same time, my boss got a construction PM job at Starbucks and told me he would come from me. Six months later, the person that was hired over me failed, so she came back to me.

Out of tragedy came something that was wonderful. Three months into my tenure with Starbucks, the Marathon Bombing took place. The second of two bombs was placed within feet of my Boylston Street Starbucks. As luck would have it, or not, all of our operations partners were in New York City for this big event that they couldn't get away from. That left me, the new kid to pick up the pieces.

I was able to work directly with the FBI and Boston PD since they were utilizing my store as the staging point to gather evidence. I'm proud to say that my store was the first business to reopen on Boylston Street. The US leadership team in Seattle started to ask, "Who is this kid in Boston?" It was at that moment my boss realized she made the right decision in putting me in Boston.

That experience really catapulted my career. When I was offered the opportunity to go to Cole Haan, I thought the experience would really help boost my skill set and industry knowledge. In my mind, I had done worked in commercial real estate offices and restaurants but never retail. This was a chance to work for a high-end retailer. A chance I couldn't justify passing on. Our headquarters happened to be two miles from my house, which dramatically benefited my work-life balance.

At Cole Haan, we're a department of two. My direct supervisor is very seasoned, and has a plethora of knowledge he's willing to share with me. With his guidance and

tutoring, I've been able to make serious strides in improving our department's productivity and cost savings strategies.

Tim Hill, The Beam Team: I started less than 47 years ago as a merchandizer doing resets with fixtures and merchandise three or four decades ago. I used to get up on Monday morning, travel all week long, get back Friday night, week after week after week. I ended up getting a really good job with Stanley Works, the tool folks. I did that same kind of job with Stanley.

I remember buying my first cellphone with my own money. It cost me \$800.00. Why? Because I used to have to roll quarters and carry a bunch of rolls around with me to use the pay phone. I can still remember having to make those calls in the rain at a gas station pay phone. You'd talk on the phone for as long as you could until some other salesman behind you who was impatient beeped the horn.



I've been in a similar type of industry my whole career. I have worked my way up. Over the years, I have lived in Grand Rapids, Michigan, Cleveland, Boston, and now Chicago.

Deidrick Kirkem, John Varvatos Enterprises: I have been in facilities now for the last 20 years. I got into it via an insurance company. I've worked in five different industries in facilities: insurance, health care, a trading company and finance. I met John while I was working for the finance company Creditex, which ironically is in our building. We hooked up on LinkedIn. There have been a lot of ups and downs, but for the most part, I love what I do.

Stephen Hekman, Kingsmen Projects:
Initially, I didn't want to get into construction or fixtures. I was going to get into advertising and work in branding, but it just seemed like those jobs didn't pay very well.

Nate McNeil, Asa Carlton: After graduating high school, I immediately entered into the trades. I worked in the general construction industry as a field manager for a while, but then decided to leave my hometown of Athens, Georgia in hopes of getting a better opportunity in a new field. I took a job as a manager of a landscape company, where I worked for about a year. This job opened the doors to new connections and I was given the opportunity to work for a well-known up-and-coming blinds company. This company allowed me to meet many Nationwide Residential Building Contractors, and through these connections sprouted many opportunities.

I ended up working for one of the most prominent residential home building companies, which bought more than 1,000 tract homes in the Atlanta market. I became a front- and back-end builder with this company, where I worked for a year or so. This job pushed me to move to the Gwinnett County area, where I met the vice president of business development for Asa Carlton Inc. He gave me the opportunity to get involved with the company because of my previous experience and connections with multiple commercial retail clients.

I have been able substantially grow from there, and I now manage a team of 10 project managers who work for me. I also have about 200 people across the country who are employed under my specific division in the field. It has been a quick, fast and maturing experience, but I've enjoyed all of it. There is a challenge every day, and I think that's my favorite part of truly mastering the commercial construction industry.

Elizabeth Parker, Quest Workspaces and Interior Designed Spaces: I actually wanted to be a fashion designer when I was younger. My mother caught me cutting up her shammy for the car. I got into big trouble and had to use an old sock or something to finish designing my Barbie dress. I wanted to be a fashion designer through high school. I went to college and received my general education degree, and then years later actually went back to school and graduated with my two year fashion design degree. I felt that I had a lot of things under my belt.

Fast forward to the job I got after my divorce. I was a merchandising manager for a company that had seven stores. While doing that, I was recruited to be a merchandising manager for a sporting goods store, which I knew nothing about, nor had any interest in (sports that is). But I was a buyer, and a merchandising manager, and I liked that.

Eventually, I had the opportunity to design the new store they were opening. It was the most fun I had ever had in my career—time flew by. I designed it like an urban playground. I found chain link fence merchandising fixtures and turned it into a super cool sporting goods store. Along the way, I fell in love with interior design. That is what I wanted to do.

So at 30 years old, I went back to school—Florida State University—and got my interior design degree. I graduated in one year because I already had all the credits from the two other degrees. I moved to South Florida, worked for a couple of companies, then was eligible to sit for the exam and took my licensing exam. I passed. I left the firm I was working with in 2006 to start my own business, which is where I am today.

Nicole Young, FacilityRx Services: I knew I was an overachiever early on. I started with Merry-Go-Round and succeeded there. They always had a plateau. You had to hit \$100,000 to be the top salesperson. I accomplished that because they told me I couldn't do it. Then I went on to my next career, which was at Olive Garden and hit \$100,000 in sales there. They told me I couldn't do that. Next was Red Lobster and Crack Barrel. I did at both places, too.

There were all of these little pieces. Got married. Started a construction company. Got divorced. When the market went down, I lost my construction company. I said to myself, "What does a girl do with all of those things on her background?" I really didn't know what I was going to do. So I went into the insurance industry for mobile homes. Didn't like that. A headhunter reached out to me with a great opportunity in the facility industry. They brought me on. I don't even know what he hired me for. I really don't even know what I was doing there, but I figured it out.

And then I got fired. They walked into my office and fired me, after everything I did. I had no idea what I was going to do. But I found my way.

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industry. I was thrown to the wolves. But I was very successful with the store. I had no management experience, but I was hiring people. I did everything. I learned a lot by trial and error.

Then came the opportunity to work with Shaw Industries. They opened up a territory in the Harrisonburg, Pennsylvania market. I was a territory manager for them for just about 15 years. I kept getting asked do you want to move up? Do you want to get promoted? But every time I was going to have to move. We wanted to stay and raise our family, so I passed on the opportunities.

Five years ago, a person retired from our company and I saw an opportunity. I thought if I am going to do something, now is the time. So I moved into corporate accounts for Shaw Industries, taking over the Sherwin Williams account. I ran corporate accounts for five years. And through that period I was able to grow their business.

I was going to retire when a customer from my retail days came to me and asked if I wanted to go to work for his company. I had been at Shaw for almost 20 years. I did a lot of soul-searching and thought, "I better do something now." So I took the leap back and went to work for FloorMax USA. Going from a manufacturer to the service side has been a real learning experience for me.

Darrel Chaney, Prime Retail Services: After 16 years in professional baseball and not making very much money back in my day, I had to go to work. I was brought up to work hard, play hard and pray

**Randy Pannell,
Converge
Consultants:
I've been either in
the architectural
or construction
business my entire
working career,
which spans
47 years. I started
when I was 17.**

hard. That's what Ernie Banks, my baseball idol, told me at my Little League Banquet in 1960. My dad had always told me that, too, but it really hit home with me when one of the greatest baseball players of all time told me. So, I had no problem looking for a job and going to work in the "real world."

After 30 years in the real estate industry working in the corporate relocation world, my company was sold and I was out of a job again. I met Donald Bloom, who is now the president and CEO of Prime Retail Services. Back then, Donald was the CFO of a competitor and decided to start his own company. He asked me to come on board and handle marketing and sales. Marketing wasn't my strong suit but, sales was.

We founded Prime Retail Services in 2003. About seven years ago, I sold me

interest in the company to concentrate on my public speaking and book, "Welcome to the Big Leagues — Every Man's Journey to Significance, The Darrel Chaney Story." The author is Dan Hettinger, a pastor. It has impacted many lives.

About a year and a half later, I got a call from Donald asking me to come back and help with some sales consulting, as the company was on an aggressive growth plan. I accepted and have been doing that ever since. Donald is one of the finest men I have ever known, and I've been around a while. I think Prime Retail Services has one of the greatest stories to tell in our industry. I really do. I'm proud to say I helped start the company and still have the opportunity to represent them, if even in a small way. **CCR**