

FOCUS: COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT

HOW I...

Overcame post-military 'dark times'

BAUER STARTED CONSTRUCTION FIRM AFTER PHYSICAL, MENTAL STRUGGLES



Eric Bauer credits military training and experience for helping him build his construction company.

JIM COURTNEY

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If there was a song that describes Eric Bauer's past life, it might very well be "Been Done So Long" by The Doors.

He doesn't hide the fact that, following four years with the U.S. Air Force, he suffered from skin diseases, cervical spine injuries and post-traumatic stress disorder.

A decade ago, he was hurting, internally and externally.

"I was embarrassed by it," said Bauer, 33. "As a soldier, you never want to show any form of weakness. I had some pretty dark times. I had all these feelings that I just didn't know what to do with."

With help from veterans organizations and family members, he found his post-military niche.

In 2007 he formed E.B. Galaxy Construction Inc.. The West Seneca-based business has landed a variety of projects, from building a restaurant as an adjunct to Buffalo RiverFest Park on Ohio Street to

ERIC BAUER

Title: President
Company: E.B. Galaxy Construction Inc.

Location: 2790 Clinton St., West Seneca

Notable local projects: Masten Avenue Armory renovations, construction manager; construction of Subway restaurant at Canisius College; ward renovations, Buffalo Veterans Hospital

Fast fact: Five of his eight employees are military veterans.

Quote: "It feels good to hire a veteran. We're all trained in the same way."

working on a \$5.1 million, women's mental health facility for the Veterans Administration in Batavia.

E.B. Galaxy — named after the C-5 cargo plane to which Bauer was assigned — is one of the few construction companies in the region owned by a disabled military veteran and employing the same. Of the eight employees, five are disabled veterans.

"You have no idea how good it feels to help someone out and give them a job," he said.

Bauer is an example of how veterans can overcome traumatic injuries and succeed after leaving the service.

"Instead of saying, 'I can't,' I decided to say, 'I can.' It is only a disability if you go around feeling sorry for yourself," he said. "I learned to empower yourself to do better, to challenge yourself."

He joined the Air Force immediately after graduating from Amherst Central High School.

He was assigned to Dover Air Force Base in Delaware but spent much of his four years flying mis-

sions in support of such operations as Iraqi Freedom, Noble Eagle and Operations Northern and Southern Watch.

In his estimate, he helped plan and direct the loading and offloading of more than 10,500 veterans and more than 8.52 million pounds of cargo.

When honorably discharged in 2004, Bauer was listed as a senior airman. He had accumulated seven medals, two decorations and a dozen ribbons.

After leaving the Air Force, he admits to feeling like a bit of a lost soul. For a while he worked construction jobs in Baltimore with an older brother.

"I saw some of my friends, a couple of whom were just 21, commit suicide," he said. "I was scared."

Coming back to his native Western New York, however, his life began to take focus.

His father runs Edbauer Construction, also located in West Seneca, and that began to serve as a career model for him. It also gave him a sense of purpose.

"I knew the road ahead of me was a long one," Bauer said. "I needed to see where I was going. Construction gave me that."

E.B. Galaxy Construction did the site and prep work for Clinton's Dish restaurant at Canalside, as well as the kiosks that opened over the winter at the Ice@Canalside. The company also built a Subway restaurant in the Old Main building on the campus of Canisius College in Buffalo.

Bauer said his construction comfort zone is smaller projects.

His average project carries a \$3 million development price tag. Many of them are public sector-driven. He said one of his goals is to win more private sector construction projects.

"We do well in that range," Bauer said.

Now he is well within his goal of seeing the company finish each year with billings of \$8 million to \$9 million.

"The thing I am proudest of is that I was at the lowest depths of emotional devastation and crawled out," Bauer said. "It's all coming together."