

Executive Profile

JEFF BIRDWELL

PRESIDENT, COMMERCIAL DIVISION,
SARES REGIS GROUP

HQ: Foster City.

Background: In 24 years with Sares Regis, Birdwell developed 5 million square feet of office and industrial buildings for public and private companies and acquired several million square feet of office and industrial buildings.

First job: Union laborer with Local 300 (Los Angeles) working nights doing demolition and placing concrete on the remodel of an I. Magnin Store in Sherman Oaks.

Education: Claremont McKenna College, B.A. in economics; undergraduate and graduate degrees in engineering at Stanford University.

Residence: Menlo Park.



Business strategy

How's business: These are challenging times, but we are beginning to see what I think will be some extraordinary opportunities. We'll break even this year (in 2009), which is a major success as most of our competitors will not be in that category.

Biggest challenge for your business: Choosing the best opportunities. Those of us who have survived the current

downturn with little or no baggage are being sought out to help sort out messes that others have created.

What will change at your company in the next year: The problem-solving and value-add skills we have will put us in the mode of repositioning property and adding value through the approval process. We're seeing more work for municipalities; more in education, a K-12 school; nonprofits. The categories will be different; office itself won't be

coming back for a long time.

Goal yet to be achieved: Helping Redwood City discover the hidden treasure of its bay and inner waterways. (Seres Regis has been hired by Redwood City to consult on waterfront planning issues.) Also, I've rowed over 4 million meters in the waterways in my rowing shell and I'd like to get to 10 million by 2015.

How will you know you've achieved it:

When we see a change in land use patterns as it relates to the water. The potential for the broader community to use and appreciate this resource is extraordinary.

Management philosophy

Guiding principles for good management:

From my grandmother, the Golden Rule: "Treat others as you wish to be treated."

Why people like working for you: We get to create great places that influence a lot of people's lives. That is a rich playing field.

Mentor: Bill Valentine, chairman of HOK. Bill is one of the best communicators I've ever met, one of the best leaders and one of the best people.

Judgment calls

Best business decision: Moving back to Northern California about 13 years ago.

Toughest business decision: The downsizing in the current market cycle. For the first time in 24 years, we did have to let people go that were A-plus people.

Biggest missed opportunity: We were creating a factory store concept in Gorman, Calif., in the mid-1990s. The community was excited about it, and we got the approvals, but missed the

market window and were not able to execute. The community would have loved the project.

Hardest lesson: The challenge about real estate is that there are no black and whites — we live in a world of grey.

True confessions

Like best about job: Shaping the built environment.

Like least about job: Paperwork and email. I like direct personal communication with people.

Most respected competitor: Tom Sullivan at Wilson Meany Sullivan.

First choice for a new career: Teaching, which I am lucky enough to do at Stanford.

Predilections

Most influential book: "A Clearing in the Distance" a biography of Frederick Law Olmstead by Witold Rybczynski.

Favorite cause: The Bair Island Aquatic Center and our children's schools.

Favorite quote: "Believe me, my young friend, there is NOTHING — absolutely nothing — half so much worth doing as simply messing about in boats." — Water Rat in "Wind in the Willows" by Kenneth Grahame.

Favorite movie: "Rivers and Tides," a documentary about landscape artist Andy Goldsworthy.

Favorite restaurant: Eating at home. I'm not a big restaurant person.

Favorite way to spend free time: Kids, rowing and flying airplanes.

Automobile: Audi S6.

— J.K. Dineen ■