

Public Good

From Intern to President — A Career Built on Integrity

BY ZOE LANCE



“Brian, what are you going to be building in five years?”

Brian Jaramillo ('87, construction engineering technology) frequently hears this question. As the president of Tilden-Coil Constructors in Riverside, he oversees the company's operations, managing hundreds of millions of dollars in construction projects across Southern California each year. He seems like the guy to ask for the inside scoop on what the region is building.

He responds with a laugh.

“I don't dictate the markets, but as long as we get to serve people and do good business, we don't care what we build,” he says. “I'm going to continue to build a company of integrity that people want to partner with, and I want to grow a generation of leaders who will meet the needs of California.”

Serving the state's public education sector is a significant area of the Tilden-Coil portfolio and one where Jaramillo has seen incredible growth. His first education project with the company was the \$17 million Cathedral City High School in 1989. Nearly 30 years later, high schools and community college districts continue to evolve, now with cutting-edge arts centers and technology hubs and stadiums.

“The quality of educational environments has really improved from when I was in school and even when I first started constructing schools,” he says. “That's predicated on the public's request for higher quality. STEM education has also changed this a lot. There are computers everywhere, and so the power and data needs not only make the costs of schools go up, but the overall effectiveness of the facilities.”

Jaramillo credits Cal Poly Pomona with changing his career trajectory. The Hayward native transferred to the university after taking community college courses and working full-time in construction. He wanted to be a developer but saw the value of a degree that focused on engineering as an applied science.

“I was hungry for any type of work I could get and I understood that work and school are the most powerful combination,” he says. “The polytechnic curriculum was more aligned with what I was after. I knew I needed to get a job in the industry while I was still in school.”

He worked part-time at a small masonry business but applied for scholarships to stay on top of his student expenses. A chance application for a scholarship sponsored by a general contracting foundation changed everything.



Jaramillo interviewed for the scholarship with an executive from Tilden-Coil who was helping to interview students. During the lunch meeting, Jaramillo shared his plans after graduation.

“I said, ‘I'm going to be straight with you. I want to work for a company like yours where I could learn from people with experience, make mistakes with someone else's money and then, in five years, start my own thing.’”

The Tilden-Coil executive appreciated Jaramillo's sincerity, both recommending him for the scholarship and offering a summer internship.

“Tilden-Coil took an interest in who I was and understood that I was somebody to invest in,” Jaramillo says. “And then I never left.”

Jaramillo has also seen the regulation side of his business significantly change since his early days at Tilden-Coil. On a construction site, both engineers and construction crews must adhere to many layers of rules and building codes. He says that in order to be successful, he and his competition must grasp the importance of being environmentally and socially responsible.

“The power of the Cal Poly Pomona engineering degree is the learn-by-doing aspect,” he says. “The college is producing people who are equipped to understand regulations. We have to embrace it and figure out how to protect natural resources and navigate the regulations better than any other organization.”

Over the course of 32 years, Jaramillo worked his way up the ladder from intern to president, managing multi-million dollar projects for institutional, commercial and industrial clients across the Inland Empire.

“When I advise people on their career growth, I tell them to just pour yourself into every opportunity you get,” he says. “Nothing is beneath you. Do a great job and don't complain. People will reward you with more responsibility.”

Jaramillo is deeply invested in giving back to Cal Poly Pomona and providing new generations of students with the same opportunities he had. He believes that as an industry leader and an alumnus, he needs to collaborate with the college to ensure future generations of engineers are equipped for the workforce. He will often return to see student projects and talk to faculty about fostering students' critical thinking and communication skills.

“I feel a debt of responsibility to Cal Poly Pomona, because it really allowed me to leverage myself and springboard in the industry,” he says. “Money alone isn't going to repay the opportunity that the institution gave me. The most precious thing to me right now is my time, and I'm willing to give that.”