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## Carrington Barrs and Gabe Genauer step out on their own to go green

BY JUSTIN STRANZL  
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Best friends and business partners Carrington Barrs and Gabe Genauer left their previous jobs and started their own firm with the intent of constructing projects they believe in, advancing green building practices in Portland and finding time for personal lives outside of work.

They're two for three.

"Our goal was to create time and space and freedom," Barrs said. "We have less of those things than we've ever had."

The owners of Barrs & Genauer Construction LLC became close friends in the 1990s at the University of Florida's Gainesville campus and then ended up in separate states, both working for Walsh Construction. Barrs landed a construction management position at the company's Portland headquarters, while Genauer completed graduate studies at the University of Washington and then landed a position in Walsh's Seattle office.

What they experienced after their days at the University of Florida altered their career outlook, they said.

As Genauer was studying green building practices at the University of Washington, Barrs was spearheading Walsh's construction of the Jean Vollum Natural Capital Center, a building certified gold through the U.S. Green Building Council's Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design Green Building Rating System, in Portland's Pearl District.

The experiences fostered a "love" of green building in both men, Barrs said. Because Walsh couldn't promise them exclusively green projects, they left last year "on good terms," Barrs said, to open their own firm in Northeast Portland.

"Walsh was an excellent training, an excellent opportunity," he said. "They were 100 percent behind my vision. I didn't leave because I was unhappy."

They also hoped to work their own hours and indulge in hobbies and personal freedoms. But although Barrs' wife "thinks we sit here goofing around and talking about surfing all day instead of working," he said, both men insist they're too busy with their new company to have much fun right now.

Said Genauer, "We're both maxed out, time-wise."

At present they're spending most of their time on a \$650,000 renovation of a building in Beaverton for the Bike Gallery. Bike Gallery President Jay Graves, an environmentalist, heard about Barrs' and



Best friends and business partners Carrington Barrs, left, and Gabe Genauer are making a career out of green building practices with their company Barrs & Genauer Construction LLC. Photo by Dan Carter/DJC.

Genauer's desire to do environmentally friendly projects and asked them to recycle as much as possible of an old building that, when finished, will replace the Bike Gallery's current Beaverton showroom and serve as the company's only store west of downtown Portland.

Barrs and Genauer were thrilled to get the offer, they said.

"If we can find an owner that's got the same values we have, we'll do it," Genauer said.

Said Barrs: "We'll do anything if it's the right climate, the right time and it's green. There's not a lot of parameters we put on it."

Throughout the project the contractors have emphasized "deconstruction as opposed to demolishing," said Genauer, who's managing the renovation efforts.

"We recycled and reused everything we could have," Genauer said. "We saved all of the lumber we demoed. And then any new stuff that we're using, where possible, we're getting it (Forest Stewardship Council)-certified."

They were able to put a premium on "deconstruction," Genauer said, in part by using "not the most efficient (mechanical) system but the system

that was most efficient for the money."

Because "so many buildings in Portland have good bones but are extraordinarily inefficient from the heating and cooling standpoint," Genauer said, he and Barrs dwelled over various optimization possibilities to ensure reduced energy costs and greater building efficiency.

"Most efficient would've been the geothermal," Genauer said. "But the upfront cost was so high that the payback didn't pencil out. We ended up going with some high-efficiency air-to-air heat pumps."

They hope to complete the Bike Gallery renovation in April, Genauer said. In the meantime, Barrs said, they'll continue to let the work come to them and define their company.

"Our only marketing is answering the phone," he said. "We can grow into something bigger ... by only taking projects that have an owner who's motivated to be learning sustainability ... A lot of businesses do commercial (work). A lot of businesses do tilt-ups. Our business is sustainability."

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