

Changing THE WORLD

THE *Roofing Industry Alliance for Progress* SELECTS ALAN BAIRD AS THE BEST OF THE BEST

by **CHRISTINE ELLE HANUS**

Terry always was outside waiting for patrons at a local 7-Eleven. He would smile and open the door for everybody. He lived on the streets, but he never asked for money. One time when he opened the door for Alan Baird, lead foreman at Core Contractors Inc., Denver, he asked Baird for a cup of coffee.

"I told him, 'C'mon, in! Buy whatever you want. It's on me!'" Baird says. "But Terry never got greedy. He would get a cup of coffee and maybe a pack of donuts, and that was it. He always had a positive attitude."

One night when the weather forecast called for bitterly cold temperatures, Baird thought about Terry standing outside in the cold. He went to the store and bought a tent and asked friends and family on social media to donate supplies to build Terry a survival bag. In addition to donated items, Baird asked everyone who donated an item to write a letter explaining who they are and what they donated.

"That way, in addition to supplies, Terry had something to lift his spirits," Baird explains.

According to Chris White, service technician at Core Contractors, going above and beyond is typical for Baird.

"He's always trying to help whether he's working on a Saturday to make a customer happy, doing things outside his job description or helping the homeless on his personal time," White says. "Alan wants to change the world."

Josh Kelly, vice president of product development and innovation for OMG® Roofing Products, Agawam, Mass., says these traits are a "shining example" of why Baird was selected as this year's Best of the Best winner by The Roofing Industry Alliance for Progress. The Best of the Best is an extension of the Most Valuable Player Awards and is co-sponsored by OMG Roofing Products and *Professional Roofing*.

A MUSICAL BEGINNING

Baird grew up in Aurora, Colo., with a "rock and roll dad who would blast Bruce Springsteen" and says he was a shy kid with a lot of ideas.

"I've always been an idea person," he says, "I was a heavy thinker with a lot of grand projects on my mind."

Baird learned to play guitar and eventually joined a band and toured internationally after high school.

"It was a lot of fun," he says. "We sold out venues throughout the world."

His parents, Jeff and Tami, were 100 percent on board with Baird's musical career.

"My dad said: 'We'll support you if you work eight hours a day on your music,'" Baird explains. "I ate PB&J sandwiches and ramen soup for a year because I felt guilty eating their food."



Photo courtesy of Mark Labriola II, Brand Viva Media, Denver.



Baird learned to play guitar at a young age and has toured internationally.

Although his band was selling out venues, he didn't make a lot of money. When he had a girlfriend, he needed a job for gas and dates. He looked on Craigslist and found an ad for a material runner and applied for the job. Within an hour, he received a reply. By the following day, he was working at a four-person, family-owned roofing company.

"That was nine years ago," Baird says. "It was good because it got my

foot in the door, but it was like working for John Wayne. I always had these suggestions about how to do the job differently and better. But I was always told I was a material runner and to do things a certain way."

CORE CONTRACTORS

After working six years as a material runner, Baird realized he was ready for a new opportunity. He again searched Craigslist and found an opening for a permit

and inspector position at Core Contractors.

"The ad basically said everything I already was doing at my current job, but it paid more and was called something different," Baird says. "So I applied for the job and went for an interview."

Tomas Wolfram, a partner at Core Contractors, was immediately impressed with Baird.

"When Alan showed up for the interview, he was dressed nicely and had a folder for his resume," he says. "You don't see that too often. I was shocked other people hadn't recognized his talents. He's the type of person that just sitting with him inspires me to be a better person."

Baird subsequently was offered the position at Core Contractors and accepted it. When he started at the company three years ago, Core Contractors was rapidly growing and had about 80 to 90 projects backed up.

"It was chaos," Baird says. "They told me they needed me to organize and sort it all out and then they left me alone."

Wolfram says the tactic was purposeful.

"We knew 'John Wayne' had taken a toll on him, so we threw him out there and gave him the environment he needed to learn and strive and then we began to see his confidence build."

Baird welcomed the freedom his new employer provided.

"When I started working at Core Contractors, it was like drinking from a fire hose because they trusted me to figure it out," Baird explains. "And so I did. At my previous job, the secretary would give me an address and tell me to go set up a ladder. Here, I got to learn how to get all the permits and contact the homeowners about the inspections."

Within two weeks, Baird got the backed-up projects under control and was given an additional responsibility of picking up material from completed projects.

"At the time, Core Contractors only had one field guy, so I was driving 10 hours a day picking up material from jobs that were completed and running out material to jobs in progress," he said. "That was my realm—picking up and delivering materials."

About two months later and after Baird sorted out the files and the company was 100 percent caught up with projects, Wolfram assigned Baird to manage his first commercial roofing project.

"Tomas said he wanted me working more in the field and with the crews," Baird says. "He told me to take a lot of photos, make sure everybody is safe and tied-off, and to make sure we were OSHA-perfect."

Baird spent the next few nights studying Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) packets and learning what needed to be done to keep his crew safe on the large shopping center project. In addition to learning OSHA regulations and how to keep a crew safe, Baird was exposed to hands-on roofing work.

"It was great for me because it was such a massive project; I got to see the same details done over and over again," Baird says. "It was a two-week project, so I saw how to draw things in and figure out how many nails to use and follow code; it basically was learning roofing 101. It also was a lot of give and take: I had to tell the crew to do things a certain way to be OSHA-safe, yet I had to ask them how to dry-in a roof."

Baird has become so good at teaching proper safety procedures, he was a driving force behind Core Contractors winning National Ladder Safety Awareness Month in March 2017 from the American Ladder Institute. Dedicated exclusively to promoting ladder safety at home



Baird providing training to co-workers



Baird helped Core Contractors Inc., Denver, win Ladder Safety Month in March 2017.

and at work, National Ladder Safety Month brings awareness to the importance of the safe use of ladders through resources, training and national dialogue.

“Alan is an integral part of our safety culture at Core Contractors, and he’s great at leading by example, so I asked him to help me out with some ladder safety training,” says Lee Lipniskis, finance manager for Core Contractors. “With Alan’s leadership and continuous dedication to keeping himself and his teammates safe while in the field, he helped us win by giving a demonstration of proper ladder safety use at a client’s house.”

Baird’s willingness to help has gained the respect of many co-workers.

“On the weekends when an email comes through and there’s an issue, he’s the first to respond,” says Dan Grant, sales manager for Core Contractors. “One time he responded that he was dropping his daughter off at the babysitter to go fix the leak. He didn’t make a big deal about hiring a babysitter; he just did it.”

Baird’s helpful demeanor also has earned the respect of Core Contractors’ clients.

“When an issue comes up, the guys ask for Alan to handle it,” Grant says. “One time, I had a difficult job and I asked Alan to meet me there. I got to see how he took the bull by the horns so to speak and explained everything to the homeowner. We almost lost the job, but we ended up getting a letter from the homeowners saying they couldn’t have been happier. Alan showed up, put the homeowners at ease and recovered the job. That’s what he does.”

In 2017, Baird’s leadership skills, ability to solve problems, dedication and willingness to help earned him a promotion to lead foreman. According to Andrew Schmidt, a partner with Core Contractors, a great trait of being a leader is having the ability to inspire others.

“A few years ago, we revamped internal roles, added benefits and started asking the question: Why do we do what we do?” Schmidt says. “We always had a list of culture values, but we learned our core values should be traits of our best people. Each of our six values has a nuance, and at least three of them were developed as a result of Alan. He has become part of the fabric of our company.”

PERSONAL TIME

According to Tre Rudig, marketing manager for Core Contractors, Baird may be even more impressive in his personal life.

“I enjoy working with him because of who I perceive him to be as a person and not just a co-worker,” he says. “He really cares about the people around him, and he puts his family first. He trained for years to become a Navy SEAL, and he ended up not doing it because of his daughter. He has a heart of gold.”

When Baird’s grandmother died the same day his daughter was born, he had an epiphany.

“I was with my grandmother when she passed away,” Baird says. “And then I saw my daughter born the same day, and it was like a light went on and I thought: I want to be in the military. I need to do something great.”

“So I started going to the gym every day. I stopped smoking, and I didn’t drink nearly as much. When you go into the special forces, they want you ready to go.”

For five years, Baird read every book and watched every video he could find about training to become a Navy SEAL. He put on an 80-pound backpack and ran the required distances. To meet his daily 5,000- to 6,000-calorie requirement to gain weight, he set an alarm at 2 a.m. to drink a protein shake.

“I worked my butt off,” Baird says. “And what that did was give me my work ethic because I went from a lazy, chain-smoking kid who only cared about getting a paycheck to working at Core Contractors and becoming lead foreman.”

Although Baird was able to pass the Navy SEAL stress and pool tests, tie knots underwater, dive down “crazy distances” and hold his breath the required amount of time, he couldn’t pass the vision test. He had multiple surgeries to correct his vision—each one prolonging the date of enlistment six months. When his enlistment day became a reality, Baird’s wife, Catherine, became nervous at the thought of their 6-year-old daughter’s father being gone.

“I would do anything for my daughter,” Baird says. “Riley is my pride and joy. I couldn’t leave her.”

Baird started dating Catherine about eight years ago, and in 2017, they married. Baird perks up when he speaks about his wife.

“I’m super proud of Catherine,” he says. “She was a hair stylist and then went to barber school and got certified. I was her test dummy and got nicked up for a while,



Baird with his wife, Catherine, and daughter, Riley



Baird and his daughter enjoy dressing up in costumes.

but she's fantastic now. She recently opened her own business, and I tell my buddies to go see her to get a cut and have their faces shaved—it's a full experience."

Baird thoroughly enjoys being a father. Similar to his professional life, he gives it his all.

"One of my favorite things about Alan is he loves dressing up in costumes with his daughter," Rudig says. "He'll put on a tutu, a wig and a funny dress, or they'll pretend to be mermaids, and they'll make funny videos."

SAVING LIVES

One time when Baird was sitting in his car with his daughter waiting at a stoplight, his intuition may have saved their lives. When the light turned green, he wasn't comfortable driving and paused. A second later, a car came barreling through the intersection.

"If I would've went, I would've gotten hit at 45 mph, and I know I would've been down for the count," he says. "And my daughter who was in the back seat would've been completely helpless."

After his near-accident experience and talking to a friend who is a certified first responder for severe automobile accidents, Baird invented two types of seatbelts.

Both are candidates for patents, so the details are secret, but both ideas essentially save first responders time looking for key information about passengers in a car during an accident.

"Seconds can save lives, so looking for information is something first responders shouldn't have to worry about when they arrive at an accident scene,"

Baird explains. "Once I have my prototypes made, I'm sitting down with an investor to get them patented."

Developing seatbelts to save lives is one of many personal projects for Baird. Following the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting in 2012, Baird began working on a security plan for schools. He previously has presented the comprehensive plan to teachers, principals, policemen and military personnel who have told him they like his plan, but it's too expensive to implement. Following the most recent shooting at Marjory

Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Fla., Baird says he is determined to fine-tune the plan and try again.

"If you're going to be passionate about something, go do something about it," Baird says. "Sandy Hook sparked the idea, and we've seen how many of these events since then? So I'm trying again. I'm basically going to email the plan to all state representatives, police departments and schools. If I can get anybody talking about it—if I can get the ball rolling that may spark another idea—that's progress made in the right direction."

Baird doesn't develop inventions and security plans for the recognition or money—he does it because he innately wants to find solutions to issues.

"When I see problems, I try to fix them," Baird says. "I'm not an expert at anything, but I can't be frustrated with something and not try to fix it. I'm not planning to make a lot of profit from any of it, but what I do make will go to Baird Survival Bags."

BAIRD SURVIVAL BAGS

In addition to designing seatbelts and a security plan for schools, Baird also is working on Baird Survival Bags—an initiative to build survival bags for homeless people. When Baird gave his first homemade survival bag to Terry, the homeless man who inspired the cause, Terry's reaction meant everything for Baird.

"He was completely blown away by it," Baird says. "And then I thought: 'This is pretty cool. I can do this more often.'"

Baird then set a goal to create 10 bags the following year. Because Core Contractors allows its staff to donate one day per quarter to a charity of their choice, Baird asked Core Contractors whether he could recruit help for the bags at work.

"Alan approached our management team about the initiative and asked whether it would be OK to bring in a box and a list of donation items for assistance with creating more bags," says Jim Horning, president of Core Contractors. "I sure had a good chuckle about that request because only Alan would ask whether that would be OK."

During a staff meeting, Baird gave a presentation and explained it would cost \$500 to build 10 bags; people could either donate money or bring in an item. Rudig loved the idea so much, he created a Baird Survival Bags logo and a GoFundMe page.

"That was so great of Tre to do that," Baird says. "And for him to make an official logo for Baird Survival Bags is super cool."

When Baird got home that evening, his wife told him



During Christmastime 2017, Baird created and distributed 100 survival bags for Denver's homeless.



When Baird distributes the bags, he takes time to learn every person's story.

he already received \$300 in donations. Baird says he immediately started to cry when he heard the news. And when he checked the page the following morning, the donation total had reached \$1,500. The cause gained momentum, and more than \$6,000 in donations were received to create Baird Survival Bags.

"After it hit the \$3,000 mark, it was pure panic," Baird says. "I could no longer buy the bags on Amazon because they don't let you buy in bulk. And I couldn't go to the stores because the bags are too expensive in stores, so then I was on the phone talking to five manufacturers in China at 2 a.m." In addition to a small tent, new coat, gloves, hat, blanket and other essential living supplies, Baird includes a resource guide in every bag.

"I've met hundreds of homeless people over the years from my time playing gigs all over and standing outside smoking, and a homeless person would come up and ask for a smoke or conversation," Baird says. "There are a lot of people who used to be successful, but they don't have a family member to call on for help when something happens. When I would ask them why they don't have a job, many said they can't get a Social Security card or an ID card."

Baird says he understands the anxiety involved with asking for help and compares it with having his credit card declined in a store.

"I don't know how many times I've gone into a store to buy something and my card got declined, and I would loudly present something like, 'Oh, that's a new card that must not be activated yet,'" he explains. "The experience makes you feel bad. Now, imagine having to ask someone where a food kitchen is—it just makes someone completely vulnerable."

Baird's resource guide eliminates some of that anxiety by providing every resource imaginable—from where to get Social Security and/or ID cards to shelters and mental health clinics to veterans hospitals and listings of labor-ready companies to get people back to work. Baird even includes his personal email address for people to contact him for resume services. If someone needs a resume, Baird creates it for him or her.

In December 2017, Baird exceeded his goal 10 times and had 100 Baird Survival Bags ready to go. Around Christmastime, he and a couple of staff volunteers from Core Contractors distributed the bags near a shopping mall on 16th Street.

"I know that area is a problem, so I figured I would start there," he says. "I also like to give the bags out at Christmastime because everyone deserves a present, and it's also right before the coldest part of winter hits."

Baird makes sure volunteers sit with the people

receiving the bags and talk to them to learn their stories.

"They're not just volunteering to hand out bags; they are volunteering to help the homeless remember people do care about them," Baird explains. "Also, no bag goes out without a personalized letter because I want them to really know people care about them. Just helping them see they are still human beings is a huge aspect of Baird Survival Bags."

After Baird and volunteers distributed the 100 bags, the story was picked up by two local news stations, and he won a \$3,000 grant from Microsoft.® In addition, after seeing the Baird Survival Bags' story on the news, a local law firm contacted Baird and offered to do pro bono work to officially make Baird Survival Bags a nonprofit organization.

"I've got \$3,000 in the bank already to make more bags, and once the organization is official, I can provide donors with tax-deductible information," Baird says. "My goal this year is to create and distribute 500 bags."

A HEART OF GOLD

Baird's dedication to being a public service champion along with his hard work, dedication and self-driven attitude to be the best lead foreman, safety trainer and co-worker are just some of the reasons he was selected as The Roofing Industry Alliance for Progress' Best of the Best during the 2018 International Roofing Expo® held Feb. 6-8 in New Orleans.

"I've never been so nervous in my life as when they called my name," Baird says. "To know my co-workers, managers and company owners think highly enough of me to nominate me is one of the greatest compliments I've ever received. Winning has pushed my standard and follows me now on every task."

Horning says no one is more deserving of the title Best of the Best.

"I can't think of a kinder soul with a purer heart than Alan," Horning says. "No one deserves the honor more. He is an example of what the true bar of excellence is within our company and within our community. He has a heart of gold, and he's changing the world." 🌟🌟🌟

CHRYSTINE ELLE HANUS is *Professional Roofing's* associate editor and NRCA's director of communications.



Baird was awarded The Roofing Industry Alliance for Progress' Best of the Best award during the 2018 International Roofing Expo.



To learn more about the distribution of Baird Survival Bags during Christmastime 2017 or to donate to Baird Survival Bags, go to www.professionalroofing.net.