

# Fort Worth Business Press

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## 15 years of little faith



PHOTO BY GLEN E. ELLMAN

Greg Barron's personal connection to the church and its mission led him to a niche market.

### G.L. Barron Co.

#### Business:

A privately-owned design/build construction company specializing in religious facilities.

#### Founded in 1988.

#### Headquarters:

4200 W. Vickery  
Fort Worth, Tx. 76107  
(817) 738-6104

#### Web: [www.glbarron.com](http://www.glbarron.com)

#### Top executive:

Greg Barron, 43,  
President

#### Employees: 25

**Billings/contracts for first quarter 2002:** \$17.3 million/\$33.4 million

## Passion drives G.L. Barron's success in building churches

### BY SHANNON CANARD

Fort Worth Business Press

Greg Barron has faith. Faith and a passion for what he's about.

What he's about is construction, and the past 15 years, he has focused his business, G.L. Barron, on what he does best – building faith-based facilities.

His concentration on building churches wasn't a whim or a financial decision; it revolved around the personal connection he felt to the church and its mission.

With the inventory of faith-based construction – 9,000 churches are built annually in the United States – Barron is perfectly positioned to capitalize on that passion and build facilities that will impact generations to come.

Greg says G.L. Barron does \$20 million annually in faith-based construction; it has at any given time, four to eight projects going simultaneously, ranging from \$100,000 - \$15 million. During the last six months, Barron has put 12,000 seats under construction, working on the First Baptist Church of Aledo, Dallas First Baptist and the Crossroads Christian Church in Arlington.

The growth in faith-based construction is nothing unusual, Barron said. "It's directly related to the growth of communities."

And with growth comes change.

Barron has taken the initiative and is leading the niche industry to new heights. He has formed the National Association of Church Design Builders (NACDB), which is a 12-member group representing over \$300 million worth of annual construction.

The association holds seminars for ministries interested in capital projects, educating ministers and pastors in financial stewardship, fundraising and capital campaigns necessary for new construction. The NACDB helps churches determine their budget and how much

of a project they can afford. It also helps develop a financial package to submit to banks for construction funding.

When Barron meets with ministries interested in expanding or building new facilities, he is quite at home, enjoying the opportunity to talk about the expertise he has spent a career acquiring.

The church experience is extremely important, Barron said. So much so, that for every project the company does, it conducts an extensive demographic study for a three- to five-mile radius, gaining an intimate understanding of the community from which the church pulls its congregation.

He wants to understand the cultural preferences of the community and develop an experience paralleling the church's mission.

He looks at the process from every angle – from standing outside the facility, looking at the façade and the front doors, to actually stepping into the lobby.

"I want to understand what is going on inside a person's head as they go through the front door," Barron said. "What kind of impression does the church make? What kind of impression *should* it make?"

Barron took a page from Disney's success at its theme parks. He suggests churches install inexpensive landscape speakers in the parking lot to play music that encourages people to go inside. Once inside, he said, the lobby should be a friendly environment, with inviting smells such as brewing coffee or baking cookies.

Those are small things, but ones that make a difference, he said.

Barron's not shy about borrowing proven ideas from other successful companies. "There's no need to re-invent the wheel," he said.

He likes the ambience and comfort of Starbucks, and encourages ministries to include cafes or coffee kiosks in their lobbies. And what else should be near the lobby, where people can congregate and talk before and after

services? A bookstore. Barron designs resource centers in which churches can provide materials for loan and sale.

In addition to reaching adults, he is re-thinking the Sunday School tag associated with the programs ordinarily offered by churches.

"What kid wants to go to school on a Sunday?" Barron said. "What if we call it The Arena? Or The Pit? And let them play rock music and have banks of TVs so they can play video games? And add caged basketball? Sounds pretty cool now."

Barron looks to his family, wife Gloria, and four children, ages 7, 11, 12, and 15, for ways to connect young people to the church.

"They aren't necessarily like me and enjoy the same things I do," Barron said. So, he has added attractions that children enjoy, but in a faith-based setting.

It goes back to the experience, and the wants and needs of the community.

"Churches are changing and evolving, as are the communities they serve," Barron said. "I'm helping to change the package."

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Barron, 43, hasn't come by his beliefs lightly. It took years of being in the construction industry to understand the niche and understand that he could do it better.

"It's important for me to do something I like and that I'm committed to," he said.

He has developed a design/build model of business, incorporating architecture and construction under one roof.

"G.L. Barron is a little bit different than most design/build firms," Barron said. "We have a seamless approach to development, doing turnkey projects since 1988."

Barron is building a 143-acre campus for the Crossroads Christian Church in Arlington. The congregation quickly outgrew its facility and turned to G.L. Barron for help constructing a 143,000-square-foot facility with a 3,100-seat auditorium. The \$12.5-million project is

expected to be complete by Spring 2004.

Although G.L. Barron has and does other forms of construction – the company has built most of the El Fenix restaurants – Barron likes to focus where he has a calling.

His dedication extends to the 25 employees of his company. Barron has spent time and resources to ensure that each employee understands the company mission and subsequently, the client's mission.

"His commitment goes deeper than the brick and the mortar," said friend and sometimes project competitor, Max Falls, president of Muckleroy Falls Construction. "He agonizes over the relationship and is deeply concerned with how the client feels."

Falls met Barron through an adult Bible study fellowship – before they ever bid against each other – and was happy to discover the reputation that had preceded Barron was indeed true.

"He's at the top of the list for integrity, quality and creativity," Falls said.

The company's purpose statement is indicative of Barron: to honor God in everything it does, develop staff to the best of its abilities, to pursue excellence, and to grow profitably.

The company has outgrown its offices at 4200 W. Vickery and is building a campus on Southwest Boulevard in Fort Worth. Barron expects to break ground in the Fall on the 11,000-square-foot building and eventually pull his Arlington office into the new location.

Barron has been busy the last year. In addition to being president of the Church Design Builders Association, he is a member of a company advisory panel called the Sullivan Group, comprised of other construction firm owners. And he recently founded the Nehemiah Foundation, a non-profit organization dedicated to assisting inner city ministries with construction projects.

Contact Canard at [scanard@bizpress.net](mailto:scanard@bizpress.net).