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Charles A. Plunkett Jr.

**Artistic Builders Inc. and
CAPCO Steel Inc.**

As a third grader, Charles Plunkett Jr. worked his first job, pumping gas and airing up tires at a gas station in Louisiana. In a family with little money, work was vital, and his father's goal of instilling a strong work ethic would ensure a profitable future for his son.

Fast-forward to 2008, and the results of Charles' strong work ethic are evident in the two companies he built from the ground up – CAPCO Steel Inc. and Artistic Builders Inc. Both companies are known throughout the country for excellence in construction.

Charles' story begins in Akron, OH, his birthplace. His father, Charles Plunkett Sr., was a minister and his forte was to revitalize somewhat troubled churches. This meant moving on to a new church in a new town once the goals were accomplished.

"We moved fairly often," Charles recalled. "It prevented me from really establishing long-term relationships. I know people who have had friends since grammar school, but I really don't have any concept of that. I think I missed something in not having those relationships. It has made me extremely relationship oriented."

At the age of 5 or 6 Charles and his family moved from Ohio to the piney woods of North Louisiana, to Arkansas, and back to Monroe, LA, where he graduated from high school.

The type of ministry his dad was in did not pay well, and Charles Jr. worked to help the family. Charles Sr. grew up the son of a sharecropper in Louisiana and began work at age 6. Growing up, he knew nothing but work.

"My grandfather was completely uneducated. He went to school two days his entire life. He couldn't read or write his own name and had to make his mark with an X.

"My dad was the oldest of five kids, and when he was 6 years old he started plowing the field with a mule. They would sit in the field, waiting for daylight to start plowing. If the moonlight was bright enough they plowed by moonlight. At the end of the day when it was dark, they would go home and do the chores.

"My dad missed the first six weeks of school every year because they were gathering the crops. By the time a new year came around, he would have either worn out or outgrown his shoes, so he was barefoot. If they had a decent crop he would typically get one new pair of

shoes when they got the crops in and sold them."

Charles' dad wore his grandfather's worn out work pants tied with a piece of rope and a shirt his mother made from a flour sack.

"People look at me with a certain amount of disbelief when I tell these stories. You see those things on television, but that's how my dad lived."

The earliest age Charles Jr. can remember having to work was the third grade, when other boys were playing ball.

"I played baseball one summer and that was it. The rest of the time I worked. By the labor laws now, it would be unheard of what I did. My dad instilled in me a good work ethic and a standard of excellence and quality that I live by today. If I mowed the grass and missed one little patch of grass, I had to get the mower back out and mow that one patch of grass. There was only one way to do things, and that was the right way."

At 15 years old Charles Jr. worked at a welding shop, which would lay the groundwork for his career in construction.

"I started out sweeping the floors and picking up scrap and hauling it out, and cleaning the bathrooms. In Louisiana you could get a drivers license when you were 15 with an agricultural exemption. So I worked and paid for a car myself. I would work every day after school and on weekends, as much and as many hours as they would let me.

"I really wanted to learn to weld. I kept asking them to teach me, and said they would someday. Finally I figured out that I would have to do something about it myself. So, after lunch I would go out and get one of the welding machines and some scrap metal and try to learn on my own. After a while they figured out that I must want to learn, so one of the guys would give me a 30-second instruction and I would practice."

On his own Charles also learned how to use a cutting torch and read blueprints. He mastered the trade and took his expertise to the level of artist.

"By the time I graduated from high school I was a certified journeyman welder and journeyman fitter. When they had a difficult job, I was the one they came to.

"Shortly after I graduated from high school they made me the shop foreman. I was 18 years old, the youngest man working there and I had guys reporting to me anywhere from 20 to 56 years old. They were concerned about putting me in charge because of my age – afraid people were not going to respect me or listen to me."

Although Charles had no formal management training, he developed ways of dealing with the age difference, by asking for the workers' input.

After several years he decided to pursue a theological education and become a minister. His father knew the president of a private theological seminary in San Antonio, so he made the move.

"It was a four-year school, and I figured out about three quarters of the way through that I didn't want to be a minister and that I liked business and construction. I finished the program, because I



like to finish what I start.

"My first year in college I worked at a welding shop burning welding rods. It was a company that manufactured stairs and handrails and carpents for apartments, condominiums and hotels. My second year in college I drove a school bus here for the Northside ISD. That was quite an experience."

Charles' third year in college found him back at the welding shop, but with a different focus. The company took him up on his offer to help out in the office.

"The owner spent about 10 minutes showing me how he did the estimating. That was it. From then on I did all the estimating."

With many late night hours writing proposals in his dorm room, the position evolved, and by the time Charles finished college he was named vice president and general manager of the steel fabricating company. During his four years with the company the gross revenue grew 10-fold.

Charles had never had control of the company's finances, and some of the practices caused him great concern.

"I thought there were some things that were very questionable in nature, and less than above board. It got to the point I couldn't stay there any longer. My personal moral convictions and ethical standards would really not allow me to stay. So I left.

"I was married, had a house payment, and didn't have two nickels to rub together, and a child on the way. I drove a company vehicle, so I had to get a ride home. I knew what it was to run certain elements of a company, but I really didn't know what it meant to start a company, but I was about to get an education."

Charles' first office was a bedroom in his house with a six-foot table, folding chair, cardboard box for files. He approached a developer that was building two self-storage projects in Kansas City, MO and asked if he could submit a proposal for the job.

"I borrowed a typewriter, typed up the proposals and dropped them off at his office. The next day he called me up and said come down and sign a contract on those first two jobs. My first full day in business I had \$550,000 worth of work to do."

Fortunately, Charles had good credit and always paid his bills responsibly. Past

relationships with suppliers paid off and he was in business.

"That first company I started in September 1985 I still own today – CAPCO Steel Inc."

The name came to him while he was typing the proposal and stands for Charles A. Plunkett Company. Today CAPCO specializes in self-storage facilities and does work in 43 states, building on the order of 1.5 million sf per year of steel structures.

Charles' second company, Artistic Builders Inc., is an award-winning general contracting company focusing on commercial construction of all types up to six stories. The corporate offices on Blanco Road were built to showcase Artistic's contracting abilities.

"I spent a lot of years working very hard, and paid some tremendous sacrifices for the success of these companies. I have gotten to the point where I could hand the mantle off some to a great guy, Roger Roycroft, who runs the operations of CAPCO. He has just been promoted to company president. That is going to free me up some."

With his extra time Charles plans to spend more time in pursuit of other interests, which are many.

He is the father of two children from a previous marriage. His son 21-year-old son, Chad, is going to school to pursue a film career. His 16-year-old daughter, Emily, lives in Louisiana with her mother.

"I am remarried now for 15 years this summer, and at the age of 13 my son came to live with my wife, Julie and I, and she raised him like her own. She provided such an incredibly nurturing environment for him."

Charles and Julie snow ski and hit the slopes often. "I have skied every resort in Colorado, and we routinely ski in Utah. I have skied in South America, the Andes Mountains, and in Europe in the Alps."

Charles also enjoys flying and got his pilot's license when just a senior in high school. He is a commercially licensed pilot to fly multi-engine airplanes, is instrument rated, and for a number of years owned a corporate twin-engine airplane.

He also played lead guitar in a country western band, but gave it up about two years ago. One thing he doesn't intend to give up is his love of adventure.

"I doubt that I will ever completely retire – I love what I do way too much. But I would like to get to a point where I can take off January, February, and March and be gone most of the time. I want to live in a place where I can snow ski all the time and fly in for meetings when needed. Another thing I want to do is get a helicopter rating. That may be something in the future for me. They say helicopters really don't fly; they just beat the air into submission. I would like to drive a racecar, something like a stockcar, and also sky-dive one day."

What would Charles like people to know about him?

"I want people to know I am truly committed to relationships and to excellence. Many of the people I do business with, I become friends with. My grandmother, on my dad's side used to say, I'd rather have a friend than a dollar. Dollars come and go, but friends are there to stay." –kf