



A Man, His Big Little Company, And A Bow PROFILE: TOM J. BEHUNIN

By Syndee Holt

Tom J. Behunin is a man preparing to face down a bear with nothing but a bow. But let's back up before we go bear hunting.

Behunin is a third-generation bricklaying Colorado native. He laughs, recalling, "I starting laying bricks with my dad when I was 10—for a quarter an hour! Man, I did some hard labor for two bucks a day."

Behunin's family has deep ties in the western United States; his great-great grandfather, Isaac Behunin, a Utah pioneer, named Zion National Park. His cabin, built in 1863, stood near the current location of the park's lodge. To this day, Behunin, the canyon named for him, is a popular backcountry destination in Zion. The family maintains a small personal memorial for him there as well.

Behunin continued his brickwork with his dad through his school years until he went to work as a brick mason for Coors Brewery in 1977. He got into supervision, leading a diverse team of 125 brickmasons, tile setters, and epoxy and paint crews. "I took care of all major painting projects," he says. After about 10 years, the 1,600-man construction crew had dwindled to about 180 men. The handwriting was on the wall, as the saying goes.

Behunin had already started his own business two years before his layoff slip came. "I was making more in a weekend on my own than all month at Coors, so it was really a godsend. Now, Tom J. Behunin Construction is the No. 1 end user of International Epoxy Coatings in the United States and Canada, and we are on track to be No. 1 again this year!" he says.

Family—At Home And In The Industry

Behunin's company is a family-run business, with his wife as president and his four children all working in the business. He usually has three kids in the field, and one of his sons acts as foreman when he isn't on the job. He says, "We have 12 employees, but it's really a little big company—I do big work and small work with my 12 people."

Having never used advertising, Behunin relies strictly on word-of-mouth for his business, and that word must be glowing, given the clients he names: Lockheed Martin, NASA, King Super, Con-Agra, Pepsi, and Frito-Lay, to name a few. His work model is some of his best advice for anyone coming into this business: "Just do good work, create a good, stable reputation, and word of mouth will generate business."

Behunin's company's main focus is the food industry. Behunin explains: "We do a tremendous amount of work for the food/meat industry. We work on weekends and long, long days. It's a never-ending battle with the meat plants, given the nature of their work and the cleaning solutions that they need to use. One of the most intriguing jobs we did was for Frito-Lay. We took 27 years of coatings off walls and re-coated, behind plastic containment, using negative air pressure, while the company was running. This was done in August, in Texas, in 120°F." He puts it quite succinctly when he says with quiet pride, "Tough jobs, they call me."

Behunin recounts some of the work he has done for Lockheed Martin: "When Lockheed wants to do a showing, they call me. The showroom is my epoxy flooring, and those floors are like mirrors for some of their newest spacecraft, including the



Phoenix spacecraft orbiter that went to Mars and the new Orion spacecraft that is replacing the shuttle."

In addition to his wife, two sons, and two daughters, Behunin has six grandchildren—one boy and five girls. You can hear the love and pride in his words: "I get to kiss the purtiest girls in the world." In fact, one of his daughters, who normally works in the field, just had a baby, so she is currently working in the office. He was getting ready to leave to take his grandson fishing when we did this interview.

And speaking of leaving, Behunin was preparing to return for his 10th trip to Alaska to go bow hunting for brown bear. He says, "I've certainly had small showdowns with bears on my other trips to Alaska, but this time it's all about the bear." Behunin, member of the Boone and Crockett Club, also has an affiliation with Orion Multimedia Pictures, and Orion is going to be filming this particular hunt for "The Dangerous Game" series. In addition to Alaska, Behunin has hunted (mostly with a bow) throughout the world, including Mongolia, New Zealand, and Canada. Traveling the world, hunting dangerous game, filming television shows, he quietly made his point: "I wouldn't have been able to do these things if I was still working for Coors." CP