

COMPTON HERALD

Compton-based construction company grows from ground up

USC alum Kevin Ramsey began his construction company in a garage; now he's a major subcontractor for the university and his daughter, also a Trojan, will soon enter medical school



Kevin Ramsey earned a master's degree in civil engineering from the University of Southern California Viterbi School of Engineering. Two major construction contracts for cement work awarded to his company, Alameda Construction Services, include the Galen Center and USC Village. *Photo by Gus Ruelas*

By Ron Mackovich

LOS ANGELES — The easiest way to catch Kevin Ramsey is by cell phone when he's navigating traffic between his Alameda Construction Services company in Compton, and various projects around Los Angeles. A frequent stop is USC Village, where Alameda Construction has poured tons of concrete.

A small, minority-owned company,

Alameda, has employed scores of Cement Masons Union employees to build the sidewalks thousands of students will traverse when USC Village opens next fall. More than 50 percent of Alameda's union workers live in the city of Los Angeles, a distinction that earned the company acclaim for exceeding local hire requirements.

"USC is a great outfit," said Ramsey, who earned a master's degree in civil engineering with specialization in construction management from the USC Viterbi School of Engineering in 2002. His company completed much of the concrete work when the Galen Center was under construction in 2005.

"When you're a small company, you

get local workers,” Ramsey said. “We’re in Compton. We do most of our work in L.A. Our workers come from where we work and live. So it helps to be local.”

With equipment to maintain, supplies to purchase, payroll to meet and new jobs to bid, Ramsey’s schedule is full. USC Village has kept him busy for well over a year.

“We started out on the work widening Jefferson [Boulevard],” Ramsey said. “When we finished that, they gave us another job and we moved to onsite concrete.”

Alameda Construction is one of more than 150 companies that have worked on the USC Village development, which has produced 4,800 construction jobs.

Starting small, staying local

Ramsey started his business by doing remodeling work in 1992 with an older, experienced contractor and friend named Harry Edwards. Ramsey worked out of a garage, and money was tight – especially when he wasn’t paid on time for work he had completed.

“If we didn’t get paid, I would do the best I could to pay the guys,” Ramsey said. “Then me and my wife, we lived off her income until some money came in. It was tougher back then. It’s still tough. You want bigger projects, but you don’t want to over-extend yourself.”

Within a few years, Ramsey and his partner graduated to bigger jobs.

“I was doing most of the paperwork, Harry was doing the construction part,” Ramsey said. “We had all these jobs going. We got a couple of city contracts, and I incorporated Alameda Construction in Compton in 1997.”

After Edwards died, Ramsey carried

on and expanded. His projects included the Alameda Rail Corridor.

“That was our first taste of big public works jobs,” Ramsey said. “We didn’t make a lot of money off that, but we were learning how to do something. Over at USC when we did the Galen Center, that was another big job for us that got us into doing larger projects. We did all the concrete outside the building. We did the alleys down Flower, Jefferson and the front of Figueroa, the steps — everything outside.”

A decade later, Ramsey’s Alameda Construction is building concrete walkways around USC Village.

Ramsey served as president of the National Association of Minority Contractors’ Southern California chapter for several years and is still active with the organization. He said there are misconceptions about how minority businesses are awarded contracts.

“It’s not a gift,” Ramsey said. “It’s not like you can just bid on a job, wave your minority certification and think you’re going to get work. You need a good track record.”

USC Village:

Already a family gathering place

Ramsey’s daughter Christina thinks of her dad when she walks by USC Village. She and her father often met there briefly over the past year.

“She had an apartment around the corner from the site,” Kevin Ramsey said. “She’d walk by, we’d stop and talk. I’d give her a hug, we’d talk a little and then she’d run off to class.”

“I remember the first time it happened, it caught me by surprise,” Christina said. “I saw someone who was the same stature

as my dad, but he wasn’t facing me. As I got closer, I realized it was him. I hit him with my lunch pail. He was surprised. He was talking to his workers. I asked him, ‘Hey are you working here?’ It was also nice seeing the workers with the Alameda shirts on; it was a reminder of him.”



Christina Ramsey. Photo courtesy of Christina Ramsey

Christina Ramsey is graduating with a bachelor of science degree in Health Promotion and Disease Prevention from the USC Keck School of Medicine. She plans to move on to medical school next, and USC Village is already a memorable place even though it won’t open until next fall.

“I feel a sense of pride, that my dad accomplished something this big,” she said. “When I walk by I immediately think of him. He helped build that, and I’m part of it too. I guess we’re part of history now.”