

# Cooking up contracts

## BRUCE RUSSO SPECIALIZES IN EATERIES

**B**ruce Russo, 48, president of TechCon Dallas, says that by working as both the designer and the general contractor on upscale restaurants, he can shave six months off the typical 12 months it takes to build a 4,000-square-foot restaurant and minimize the conflict between the architect, owner and contractor. His clients include the newly opened Toulouse as well as Taverna and Perry's Restaurant. Last year, TechCon Dallas completed six restaurants. Plans call for 10 to be finished this year. By next year, Russo says the company will be building 12 restaurants a year. He was interviewed by Cynthia D. Webb.

**TELL US ABOUT YOUR FAMILY.** My wife, Mary, and my sons, Joe, 26, Nick, 21, and our daughter, Gina, 19.

**WHERE DID YOU GROW UP?** Cleveland, Ohio.

**WHERE DID YOU GET YOUR EDUCATION?** I'm a certified professional building designer for the state of Texas.

**WHAT WAS YOUR FIRST JOB?** I started working for my father, Richard Russo, when I was 8 years old. I learned honesty is the best policy, to treat people fairly and never to sacrifice integrity.

**WHO ARE YOUR ROLE MODELS?** My father, a contractor, introduced me to all the trades in the building business — the basic foundation for my professional success.

**WHAT WILL YOUR COMPANY LOOK LIKE IN A YEAR?** We've acquired new designing software. Now clients will be able to walk through — in real time — their completed restaurant before it's even built. With this process, the owner understands what they're buying, and it puts them at a better comfort level.

**IN TEN YEARS?** Currently, half of our work is construction, half is design. In a decade, design will account for 80% of our business.

**WHAT WILL IMPACT YOUR INDUSTRY MOST IN THE NEXT QUARTER?** Labor costs and Hurricane Katrina have created a high demand for building materials.

**WHAT'S THE SMARTEST BUSINESS DECISION YOU'VE MADE?** It was becoming a design-

build firm instead of being just a contractor.

**WHAT'S THE WORST?** Expanding my previous construction companies too rapidly. It was a nightmare: You can't keep track of the employees, the materials and the progress.

**WHAT THREE WORDS DESCRIBE HOW OTHERS THINK OF YOU?** Professional, energetic and committed.

**WHO'S HAD THE GREATEST INFLUENCE ON YOUR CAREER?** Al Greenfield, who did the printing for Neiman Marcus for 40 years. I used to have coffee with him once a week. He was a man full of wisdom.

**WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR SOMEONE GRADUATING FROM COLLEGE?** Don't always take the easy road. If you think you're going to get a lifelong career by putting in six months of work, that's not going to happen.

**WHAT DO YOU WISH YOU'D INVENTED?** The computer CD or IPOD? **AND WHAT MUSIC HAVE YOU BOUGHT?** I got an iPod for Christmas that hasn't been opened because my 2-year-old computer is too old to download music.

**WHAT'S YOUR FIRST CHOICE FOR A NEW CAREER?** I'd be a district attorney prosecuting white-collar crime. I'd be like Denny Crane (William Shatner's character) of "Boston Legal."

**WHAT ARE YOUR PET PEEVES?** People that don't do what they promise to do. There are a lot of people like that in this business.

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