

HDR: Keen fell in love with bridges while attending the University of Iowa

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for it to shrink and “creep.” His U of I professor Don Branson proved that to the bridge-building industry.

“I found something that I really had a passion for,” Keen said. “That’s what got my interest in civil engineering.”

“Eventually, I found that when you start work on these projects, they’re very complicated in terms of public acceptance, resources needed, the impact these projects have.”

He helped develop bridges all over the western United States, working for Parsons Brinckerhoff, an engineering and design firm that got its start with the New York City subway in 1885.

Along the way, Keen ran into folks with HDR, which has its own transportation division and, according to Engineering News Record, is now the No. 1 bridge design company in the United States.

His HDR contact was Bill

Korf, executive vice president in charge of HDR’s high-way practice in Phoenix.

“He was just a great professional,” Keen said, and told Keen, “Sometime, you should come work for us at HDR.”

After 15 years as an engineer, in 1993, Keen switched to HDR, which promptly sent him to oversee its Alaska office and its work on a tunnel leading to Whittier, a community not far from Anchorage.

The catch was that the tunnel was built during World War II for trains. It included a system that loaded motor vehicles onto flatbed railcars and hauled them through the 2½-mile tunnel, the longest in North America.

HDR’s challenge was to design a roadway for cars above the railroad tracks. The result is a one-way tunnel, with staging areas at each end so “platoons” of cars could take turns going through.

Keen did the environmental impact study of the project

and was hooked on HDR, at the time owned by a French engineering firm, Bouygues. In 1996, company executives bought the firm back, and it’s been broadly owned by employees ever since.

Omaha’s other longtime architecture and engineering firms include DLR Group, also employee-owned, and family-owned Leo A Daly Co. All three win national rankings and, along with contractor Kiewit Corp., give the city a cadre of professionals in the building industry.

Keen’s HDR projects have included the Ravenel Bridge in South Carolina, and the State of Oregon’s \$1.3 billion 300-bridge replacement program in the mid-2000s.

He eventually made his way to Omaha, initially in charge of HDR’s transportation division and in 2011 as president and chief operating officer, the No. 2 spot.

When George Little retired as chairman and CEO at the end of 2017, Keen moved up,

becoming HDR’s eighth CEO in its 101 years.

Keen, 60, said the goal is a smooth transition, continuing to build HDR’s 217-office network, initiating its latest five-year plan, acquiring engineering and design companies with growth in mind and expanding its services for clients.

Even from Little’s predecessor, Richard Bell, Keen said, “We have always been on the same page with regards to employee ownership, where our company is going, how to go about growing the organization, the commitment to have Omaha as our headquarters and our home.”

“The organizational focus of the company, the hometown, all that’s been absolutely consistent for us for a long time.”

HDR’s multiple offices give it a strong local presence in many cities, Keen said. “That allows our global expertise to be leveraged to support those

local programs.”

“If we have a unique project, and we have a need for some unique design capacity or expertise, whether it’s architecture, engineers, scientists, consultants, whoever, we draw upon that global expertise to be able to serve those local projects,” Keen said.

HDR has made 55 acquisitions since 1996, and Keen sees potential for more firms with expertise in technology, including cybersecurity; water-related projects from flooding to drought; health care and science; federal government support; and secondary education.

HDR had revenue of \$2.36 billion last year, up from \$2.2 billion in 2016 and about \$200 million when the employee buyout took place.

By the end of this year, the firm will vacate its two buildings at 84th Street and Indian Hills Drive, which have been bought by Children’s Hospital, and a building near We-

stroads Mall. HDR will lease its new headquarters in the Aksarben Village development from Noddle Bradford 2017, owned by developers Jay Noddle and Dana Bradford.

“We’re looking forward to it,” Keen said. “We’ve been here since 1972, and I’m sure we can find some furniture that’s been around since the 1970s. It’s been a great building, but there’s always some excitement about moving into a new building and bringing everybody together under one roof.”

He remembers adding the second building on Indian Hills Drive in 1997. It quickly filled up.

Out-of-town staffers also are looking forward to the new headquarters, he said. HDR books more than 5,000 hotel nights a year for visiting staff and clients.

There’s no chance that HDR would become publicly owned or sell out to a bigger buyer, Keen said. “We’re committed to the employee ownership model.”

The National Center for Employee Ownership ranks HDR as the ninth-largest employee-owned business in the United States, with 9,650 employees.

One of Keen’s first duties as CEO was to visit offices in Australia and Germany to roll out the employee ownership programs for those countries, which use “synthetic equity” to mirror the benefits of owning HDR stock.

He visited offices in Australia, the Middle East and Europe, then came back to Omaha, a 12-day, around-the-world trip. HDR has 189 offices in the United States and 28 abroad, compared with 32 in the United States when it became employee-owned.

Keen and his wife, Julie, have a daughter, Maggie, who is finishing a degree at Bellevue University and applying for law school, and a son, Adam, who is completing a doctorate at the University of Southern California in civil engineering, specializing in coastal tsunami sea-level rises.

Keen is a downhill skier — not a snowboarder, thank you — and enjoys golf, although he says his game would improve if he had more time to play. He and his wife go for frequent walks.

These days, Keen doesn’t get to work on bridges, although he reads up on the latest projects and designs.

His community duties include serving on the Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce executive committee and on the board of Bellevue University, but he’s mostly focused on the HDR leadership transition.

As the new building was being designed, Keen and Little were talking about the layout of the executive floor.

“I said, ‘George, we continue to push all our folks into smaller offices because we don’t have as much stuff as we used to. We have to think about that in terms of how we design this new building.’”

After Little announced his retirement, Keen said, “He looked at me as we were working at the office layouts and he said, ‘Now that it’s your office, what do you think?’”

How did it turn out? The office will be on the top floor, in a corner with a view to the west, Keen said. “It’s an appropriate size.”

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INSIDE BUSINESS

To place your business announcements, contact the Announcement Consultant — call 402-444-3130, email announcements@owh.com or online at Omaha.com. Deadline is Monday, one week prior to publication.

PROMOTIONS

Centris Federal Credit Union



Tom Huston



Ann Helm



Rick Pratt



Jeff Shapiro



Donna Naimoli

Centris Federal Credit Union Announces Five Executive Promotions

Centris Federal Credit Union is pleased to announce the promotion of **Tom Huston**, Executive Vice President, Chief Financial Officer; **Ann Helm**, Executive Vice President, Retail and Administration; **Rick Pratt**, Executive Vice President, Credit and Risk; **Jeff Shapiro**, Executive Vice President, Lending and **Donna Naimoli**, Senior Executive Assistant.

Tom Huston — Executive Vice President, Chief Financial Officer. **Huston** joined **Centris** in 2015 bringing technical accounting expertise, financial services background, and internal controls/risk management knowledge. During his tenure with **Centris**, he has been instrumental in leading significant improvements in **Centris**’ compliance and regulatory control environment.

Ann Helm — Executive Vice President, Retail and Administration. In 2001, **Helm** joined **Centris** in the Human Resources department. She has grown with **Centris** into her role leading Retail, HR, and Facilities divisions. Under her leadership for Retail, **Helm** significantly grew **Centris**’ loan and deposit portfolios through aggressive expansion with new branches in Omaha, North Platte and Council Bluffs. **Helm** continues to proactively further **Centris**’ commitment to Omaha with a new branch near 195th & Harrison Street and plans for a new headquarters building.

Rick Pratt — Executive Vice President, Credit and Risk. **Pratt** joined **Centris** in 2012 and brought a credit and risk management discipline that has driven prudent and practical growth of the loan portfolio. Under his leadership **Centris** has seen significant growth in loans and reduction in delinquencies. **Pratt** leads the Technology Services department and under his leadership the team has had success in the selection of new banking systems and data center move.

Jeff Shapiro — Executive Vice President, Lending. **Shapiro** joined **Centris** in 2009 as Mortgage Production Manager. Through his leadership, **Centris** has had significant growth in mortgage loans, mortgage servicing and tripled the number of mortgage members served. As **Centris** has grown, **Shapiro** has added to his responsibilities Indirect Auto, Indirect Merchant, Commercial, and Construction departments.

Donna Naimoli — Senior Executive Assistant. **Naimoli** has been employed at **Centris** since 2002. During her tenure, **Naimoli** has supported several executives and Board of Directors and Supervisory Committee members. In 2017, **Naimoli** passed the Professional Administrator Certification of Excellence (PACE) Certification. In addition to her current responsibilities, **Naimoli** will leverage her expertise to support the EVPs mentioned.

Founded over 80 years ago, **Centris Federal Credit Union** is one of Nebraska’s largest community chartered credit unions. **Centris** serves Douglas, Sarpy, Lincoln and Pottawattamie counties and has 12 offices located in Omaha, Grand Island and North Platte, Nebraska and Council Bluffs, Iowa. Our mission is to be a trusted life-long financial partner. Visit our Web site at www.centrisfcu.org.

NEW HIRES

Huffman Engineering, Inc.



Joe Dodendorf



Grant Benson

Huffman Engineering Hires Electrical Engineer Joe Dodendorf and Mechanical Engineer Grant Benson for Lincoln Office

Huffman Engineering, Inc., a leader in control systems integration with offices in Nebraska and Colorado, today announced the recent hiring of Electrical Engineer **Joe Dodendorf** and Mechanical Engineer **Grant Benson** to support the company in its development and execution of turnkey automation projects for manufacturing and utility customers.

Joe Dodendorf joins **Huffman Engineering** as an Electrical Engineer. **Dodendorf** gained professional experience at Davis Design as an electrical engineering intern. Prior to that, he worked as an engineering intern for the Facilities Management and Planning office at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL). **Dodendorf** earned his Bachelor of Science in Electrical Engineering at UNL with a focus on power systems, and has passed the Fundamental of Engineering (FE) exam.

Grant Benson joins **Huffman Engineering** as a Mechanical Engineer. **Benson** is a recent graduate of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln where he earned his Bachelor of Science in Mechanical Engineering. While studying at UNL, **Benson** participated in two biomedical design projects. He designed and printed a prosthetic knee using CAD software and a 3D printer, and designed and tested a medical device for Madonna Rehabilitation Hospital. **Benson** gained professional experience as a student intern at the Nebraska Department of Roads, where he used CAD software to design roadways, intersections and sewer systems. **Benson** has passed the Fundamentals of Engineering (FE) exam.

Huffman Engineering has a 29-year history of delivering large-scale system integration projects for highly regulated industries which require clients meet stringent regulatory requirements.

About Huffman Engineering, Inc.

Huffman Engineering, Inc. is a CSA Certified control systems integration company offering turnkey engineering design and control systems integration services to manufacturing and utility customers. **Huffman Engineering** has served the Midwest since 1987. For more information, visit HuffmanEng.com.

The Strawhecker Group



Al Novacek

The Strawhecker Group Hires Al Novacek as GEM Operations Manager

Omaha-based analytics and consulting firm, **The Strawhecker Group (TSG)** has hired **Al Novacek** as GEM Operations Manager.

Novacek has over 20 years of experience in the merchant processing, credit card, and IT fields. As the GEM Operation Manager, **Novacek** handles the day-to-day operations of **TSG**’s Gateway Enterprise Metrics (GEM) product, which benchmarks Payment Gateways from the merchant, developer, partner and consumer perspectives. **Novacek** is also involved in the sales and promotion of GEM, while also seeking innovative ways to improve and grow the platform to increase value for all GEM subscribers.

“GEM is turning out to be a breakthrough product for the firm and we are confident that Al’s industry experience and technical background will help us push GEM to new heights,” said Mike Strawhecker, Principal at **TSG**.

Novacek was most recently a Senior Project Manager at

Citi Bank, where he worked on the Macy’s credit card portfolio conversion. Prior to that, he was at Planet Group, where he managed all card network updates into Planet’s back-end. Before that he spent nearly 20 years at First Data where he had multiple roles in the IT field.

“GEM has quickly grown, with current subscribers accounting for an estimated 50% of all payment gateway transactions in the U.S.,” said Kurt Strawhecker, **TSG** Managing Partner. “By adding Al to the team, our clients will ultimately benefit from the additional hands-on service as we push the boundaries of analytics and consulting.”

Novacek graduated from Iowa Western in Council Bluffs, IA and has four children. He is a huge Nebraska Husker fan and enjoys attending live music concerts in his spare time. **Novacek** is also very involved with volunteering in the community and enjoys outdoor activities.

About TSG
The Strawhecker Group (TSG) is a fast-growing analytics and consulting firm focused on the electronic payments industry. The company serves the entire payments ecosystem, from fintech startups to Fortune 500 companies. The firm provides its clients with advisory services, research and analytics to help them plan and execute their strategic initiatives. Based in Omaha, a recognized payments industry hub, **TSG** is an established leader in this high-growth, ever-evolving space. For more information, please visit www.TheStrawGroup.com.



Veridian Credit Union



Gabe Wilcox

Veridian Credit Union announces hiring of Wilcox

Veridian Credit Union is pleased to announce **Gabe Wilcox** has been hired to the position of mortgage loan originator.

Wilcox, a resident of Gretna, Neb., was a real estate lending manager at AAA Bank. He has a master’s degree in Finance from Bellevue University and a bachelor’s degree from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. **Wilcox** is a member of Brookside Church where he serves on the Benevolence Committee. **Wilcox** is also a youth baseball coach in Gretna.

Veridian Credit Union is a member-owned, not-for-profit financial cooperative founded in 1934 in Waterloo, Iowa as John Deere Employees Credit Union. Earnings are returned to members through better rates and low-to-no fees. The credit union offers a full range of business and consumer financial services, including accounts, loans, guidance, investments and insurance. Membership is open to anyone living or working in the credit union’s geographic field of membership, including Council Bluffs, Omaha and surrounding communities. For more information, visit veridiancu.org or call (800) 235-3228.

Headquarters: I’m glad we’re in Omaha

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disagreements over parking and other issues.

Keen is diplomatic about the location decision, reached when George Little was CEO of HDR. Keen succeeded Little, who retired at the end of 2017.

“At that time, George and I and a lot of our senior leadership were very involved in trying to make the right decision,” Keen said in an interview. “I think most importantly, the decision was always to be here in Omaha.”

“There were lots of good sites. At the end of the day, this just happened to be the one that made the most sense for us at the time.”

His personal opinion about the downtown location versus Aksarben?

“You know what?” Keen said, smiling. “I’m glad we’re in Omaha.”

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INSIDE BUSINESS

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