From the Desk of Jeff Banning ~

Looking Back on the Past 30+ Years –



30 years is a long time! On a beautiful day in the winter of 1994, it was becoming obvious that the firm I was working for, was in financial trouble, or at least the new owners were not interested in investing in their Indianapolis office. At that time, my wife Nettsie and I had three children – Craig, 6, Wade, 4, and Michael, 2. Nettsie was pregnant with our soon-to-be-born daughter Mary. One day, as we contemplated our future (we were at Swinford Park in Plainfield, where we loved taking our kids), we sat on a park bench and said a prayer, asking God to be with us in our decision to start a new engineering company. As I told Nettsie, the worst that could happen is that we don't succeed, and I go find a job somewhere else. Thus, the start of Banning Engineering.





Let's back up with the story. I was born in Richmond, Indiana, in 1961. I grew up there and graduated from Centerville High School. I was a sports fan and especially liked Major League Baseball and the Cincinnati Reds. Living through the Big Red Machine era was a kid's dream. An occasional trip to Riverfront Stadium with my fellow little leaguers was so enjoyable. My father played baseball as a kid and was coached by my grandfather in American Legion ball. Apparently, my grandfather's teams made many trips to national tournaments. As a kid, he would take me and my brother Terry to ball games. We learned early on about discipline, teamwork, and success. My dad told the story several times about how he played with Pete Rose in a tournament prior to Rose's success. My dad was a second basemen, and so was Rose. Of course, the story goes that Rose played second in that tournament, my dad played outfield, and as you might guess, he did better than Pete. Who knows? As I have reflected on that story, I often wonder if he was disappointed that he didn't get to the big leagues and Pete did. I also wondered if he hated that Pete Rose was my favorite player. I guess I will never know that answer as my father passed away last year.

Childhood was really enjoyable for me. Even though my parents divorced, my dad remarried a great lady, and we had a blended family. We grew up in a newer neighborhood that had all kinds of fun kid things. With woods nearby, streets that were safe to ride bikes on, and many kids to play with, we had a great time. Our family would go camping, and I have many fond memories of Starve Hollow Lake, Jackson Washington State Forest, and Versailles State Park, to mention a few places we camped. The love of the outdoors was put in place real early on in my life. I think being a non-conformist was instilled early as well.







My dad was not a big fan of Boy Scouts, so we joined a YMCA-related group called Indian Guides. It was much more hands-on, less into badges and awards, and more about doing boy stuff. My favorite trip was taking a bike ride with the group and camping along the Whitewater River near Brownsville, Indiana. We carried our supplies with us, camped out, fished, cooked our food over the campfire, and just enjoyed. That might have started my love for bike riding for distance.

We would have a neighborhood Olympics every summer. We created events around the neighborhood and kept score of our gold, silver, and bronze medals. I believe that this is what spurred me on to become a long-distance runner. I wasn't very fast in the sprints but could seemingly run for those long distances. I definitely know that was the one childhood event that spurred my love of running. I started running cross country in middle school and then high school. Although I wasn't that great, at least not for those short distances – 2.5 miles in cross country and 1 & 2 miles in track – when we got out on the roads in summer road races, I found my sweet spot. Between my junior and senior years, Coach Stephens encouraged us to run a lot of miles. We had the 500, 750, and 1000-mile club. I reached the 1000-mile club that summer, which was probably too many miles to run, but I was on a runner's high that summer. I actually ran three marathons that summer, and after just turning 17 years old, I qualified for the Boston Marathon by running under three hours in a fun 80-degree summer race in Ft. Wayne.



Let's say God was never really a big part of my life. We never really attended church, although when my dad and stepmother first married, they would take us to a small Baptist Church. None of that religious stuff mattered much, and it was really confusing to me. But it was fun to get gifts every Sunday for showing up. After a while, that attending stopped. We became a family of – we believe in God but don't necessarily need to go to church to believe. Anyway, looking back on life, it is truly amazing how my life has been influenced by Godly wisdom and advice. My next-door neighbor was a financial aid counselor at Earlham College. With no one in my family having ever gone to college and me looking towards that opportunity, we were blessed to have him live next door so that we could ask questions. During high school I enjoyed drawing maps of countries. I would hand sketch them, color them, bind them up, and keep them in a three-ring binder. It was a really fun hobby of mine. As I started thinking about college and what I might study, I suggested to our neighbor that I wanted to be a cartographer – a map maker. Remember that comment about Godly influence? My neighbor's father was a cartographer and worked for Rand McNally. What are the odds? He said that his father got a civil engineering degree and thought that would be a good course of action for me just in case cartography didn't work out. What great advice! What a great God!



The search for a college was on, and it was on for a family that had no idea what they were doing. Civil engineering takes quite a lot of high school prep, which was not my case at good ole Centerville High School. If anyone went to college, most kids at my school were expected to go to Ball State and become a teacher or accountant. It's not that those careers were bad by any means, but that's where the counselors directed the students. Well, choosing my potential college choice and education came rather late in my high school career. With my education, I would have been okay for an accounting career, but for engineering, not really. Upon graduating, I had taken no physics, no chemistry, and no advanced mathematics. Let's say that my prep for college engineering was very much lacking. But somehow, I was accepted to the University of Evansville. Fortunately, we had a family friend who had moved to Evansville with his family a couple of years prior, so that was helpful, I am sure. He was in the financial aid office, and that was definitely a blessing as well. I was going to room with a buddy of mine from high school. He never showed, so I was 5 hours from home with no car and no friends. It was a good thing that I decided to run cross country. At least initially, I had buddies from the team to hang with, especially since we had to arrive at school early.

Why the University of Evansville? Well, for one, they had Division 1 basketball (I sent my first set of SAT scores to UNLV, Hawaii – Hilo and Ball State if I remember correctly. UNLV were studs in basketball, and Hawaii – Hilo had upset someone around that time frame). This was 1979 when I started college. In 1977, an airplane accident tragically killed the U of E basketball team. That was the first year of Division 1 for the team. After winning 5 Division II National Championships, they decided to move up. In 1978, they recruited many players from other schools that the NCAA allowed to play immediately. That was not allowed back in the day. It's too bad that things have changed in today's sports world. Second, I wanted to run cross country. Although that only lasted a year and a half, I was glad I could compete at the college level for a time. Third, the female-to-male ratio was 4 to 1. That was a great ratio! And fourth, they had civil engineering. I am not sure I had my priorities quite right, but I eventually got them straightened out – basketball, classes, and then the search for a wife, of course, with the search being the most significant of all the results.



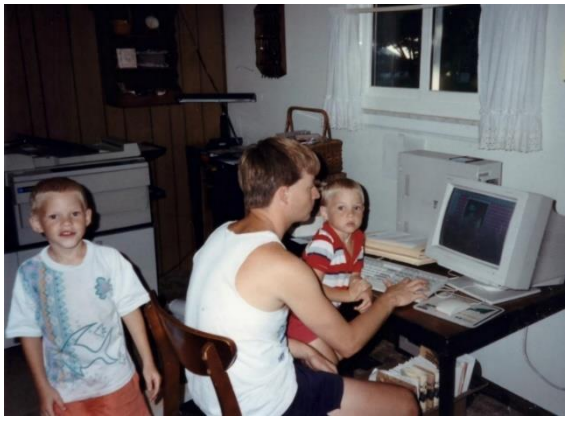


So Nettsie and I met in 1980 at U of E. Her maiden name is Manning. When we introduced ourselves to each other at a dorm party, and she heard my last name, she said she was going to marry me so she'd only have to change one letter in her last name. Well, honestly, I was not real impressed with her, and I don't believe that she was real impressed with me either, but again, God has a funny way of making things happen. Our friends hung around with each other, so we were around each other quite often, and by the end of the school year, we were starting to show interest in one another. I graduated in 1983 and moved to Indianapolis. I worked at Mid States Engineering on the third shift, creating maps. I became a cartographer of sorts. I worked in the photogrammetry department, and guess what? Cartography wasn't all it was cracked up to be. Fortunately, Mid States was a company with multiple departments. Within nine months, I had transferred to the highway department and started using my civil engineering degree. Nettsie graduated in 1984, we were married in 1985, and we lived in an apartment on the west side of Indianapolis for a couple of years. We moved to Plainfield in December of 1986 into a 1200 square foot aluminum-sided National Home, a starter home! And our family life began. Why Plainfield and Hendricks County? God thing again!



Fort Walton, as we affectionately called it, became Banning Engineering's first headquarters. Working out of the house, I would literally get up in the morning, open the garage door, and watch the sunrise in my makeshift office. That was our start in 1994 after the park bench prayer. When we started, there was really no work lined up; there was really no understanding of what business was all about. I was fortunate that after my work at Mid States Engineering, I was able to work at Lewis Engineering in Plainfield. I found out that highway engineering wasn't my cup of tea, either. Seeing things designed, constructed, and closed out in a much faster timeframe versus state highway work was important to me. The private development work was my true calling, and it fit my goals of becoming a community person and eventually a community leader. I still had work to accomplish at my previous firm, which resulted in a little income. But at that point, Nettsie became a full-time daycare provider for several other kids as well. Can you imagine three kids of our own, four other kids coming into the house and trying to work from home? When you start a business, you do what you need to do to make ends meet. We were so blessed! Looking back on this time of our life, it is just so amazing how we made things work.





Starting a business on a "leap of faith" isn't the most preferred way of doing business, but that is how it happened. Having connections from my previous experience at Lewis Engineering was so important. There were many contacts that I had created previously and many friends and business relationships that had been built. That was huge for our success. It also helped that we had created a relationship with a local bank. Citizens Bank has been our bank since we moved to Plainfield. Fortunately for us, they saw something in Banning Engineering and this start-up and gave us a home equity line of credit. This gave us a little cushion in case we couldn't pay the bills. To this day, I am so grateful for their willingness to help in our "leap of faith".

The world was before us! At this point, Hendricks County was the second or third fastest-growing county in the state. So our little business started to grow, and grow it did. We were so blessed, and at first, the thought was to have five employees to conquer the world. That thinking quickly changed as we matured. After running the business out of the

house, out of personal vehicles, utilizing the library and Hooks Drug Store for meeting space and office supplies, and hiring employees, we needed to think about office space. That search became very difficult. Reflecting on this office search, it has become apparent to me that I was on a trajectory to become an alpha dog, as discussed in the book Pendulum by Roy H. Williams and Michael R. Drew, and I was going to drag our team along for the ride.

First of all, while searching for office space, there was nothing available that seemed to work. The one potentially viable location which met our needs from a space and rent standpoint was on the east side of Plainfield but had an Indianapolis address. Right then, we decided that Banning Engineering would have a Plainfield address and that we would separate ourselves from other Indianapolis firms. Our number one goal was to be the preferred provider in Hendricks County and still provide services in other locations as well. John Albertson was a good friend of ours, and he stepped to the forefront and remodeled an existing building he owned to allow us to have our first office. It was in downtown Plainfield behind Stacey's (also Kristy's and today Flap Jacks). Stacey's became our meeting space and coffee/lunch place of choice.



We continued to be so blessed and grew out of our space. John stepped up again and built a new office for us in the Andico Industrial Park on Tower Road. That building became the first incubator in Hendricks County. Besides Banning, we had JDH Contracting, Raymond's Alignment, Whicker Construction, Albertson & Sons, and others. Banning became an alpha dog again in helping to create the first incubator in the county, but we did it with John Albertson's help and without typical governmental help, which you would likely see today. It was all privately funded, and it grew into what incubators are supposed to do – create opportunities for small businesses to grow into other locations. Within several years, between Banning growing and needing more space and the other companies growing out of space as well, we all became profitable companies in the community. And that continues for us all today.



Once again, after growing out of our office space, we moved to our current location on Ronald Regan Parkway. We had hoped to move to downtown Plainfield but were unable to make that happen. I had become the chairman of the Chamber's Downtown Committee (I missed a meeting and was placed in the chairman position), and we dreamed about how downtown could be redeveloped and reinvigorated. When I-70 was created, that really changed life for US40. Downtown started to take a turn for the worse. We discussed how that could be changed so that the core of the Town could be improved. Part of my hope was that Banning's corporate office could be a part of that. Once again, that alpha dog thinking didn't come to fruition, but we were able to at least set a course of action for things to come in the future. Our location at the end of the Indianapolis International Airport runways has been a great success. In a business that doesn't need visibility, that visibility was really important and helped us grow beyond our imagination. That company, which was to have five employees, has expanded to 60+, and our services have gone from private site development work to a team that works all over the state and has a full complement of services.





Who would have thought that from a park bench prayer, we would become a thriving company that is now employee-owned (ESOP) with over 60 employees who have become corporate citizens in the communities we serve? We have been so blessed for the past 30 years and look forward to being even more blessed as we move forward. Thank you to all who have made Banning Engineering what it is today!!!

~ Jeff Banning