



PHOTO BY THOMAS WASPER

**Success:** John F. Kurzeka (left) and Timothy L. Violé have created a general contracting business that caters to a range of industries and project types.

# Building a Reputation

By **ANGELA C. ALLEN** Staff Reporter

*Timothy L. Violé and John F. Kurzeka met as high-spirited teenagers in the hallways of Crespi Carmelite High School in Encino.*

*From that meeting, they forged a friendship that lasted through college, weddings, and eventually a partnership in the construction business.*

*The duo own and operate T. Violé Construction Co. Inc., a Tarzana-based general contracting and engineering firm, founded by Violé's father in 1958. Violé, 54, serves as the firm's chairman. Kurzeka, 54, is president and CEO.*

*T. Violé, which employs a full-time staff of 15, has a portfolio of clients that spans a broad range of industries including Warner Bros. Studios, Universal Studios, Galpin Motors, Northridge Fashion Center, TWC Aviation, Maguire Aviation and dozens of others. Commercial projects have included country clubs, financial institutions, auto dealerships, office buildings, retail shopping centers, restaurants and self-storage facilities. T. Violé also has completed a wide range of industrial projects, as well as institutional projects such as churches and schools. And as the local representative for Butler Manufacturing Company, the*

**Question:** Tim, did you always want to follow in your father's footsteps and take over the business?

**Violé:** I grew into it, to be honest. I'd grown up with my father in the business. I started literally in the trenches — cleaning up, working as a laborer and then as a carpenter. And (then moved) on up to assistant superintendent out in the field. I did a little bit of design work, mostly drafting work on some of the retail work that my father performed. So I drew plans and eventually worked my way into the office. My father did various types of buildings. As a result, we stayed pretty diverse in our pipeline over the years.

**Q:** You've done several aviation-related projects such as hangars and fixed-based operations. Is that a niche you've carved out more recently?

**Violé:** Over the last 10-15 years, we've done more and more.

**Q:** How did you begin to develop aviation projects?

**Violé:** In 1984, we were appointed a Butler Builder distributorship, which gave us the rights to sell pre-engineered steel products, representing our supplier Butler Manufacturing. These pre-engineered metal buildings are an engineering alternative. It's a different solution to putting a building together. They typi-

*industry's largest supplier of pre-engineered metal building systems, T. Violé serves users on both a general contractor and subcontractor basis. Projects include heavy and light manufacturing structures, warehouse structures, maintenance facilities and aircraft hangars.*

*Violé, who rose through the ranks of his family's business, approached long-time friend Kurzeka about coming aboard as a partner in 1999 as his father's health declined. Kurzeka previously had spent 17 years with Los Angeles-based Illig Construction Co., where he was a minority shareholder.*

*Kurzeka said he brought more structure to the company and improved operations by creating new procedures and policies. "I was looking for a change," Kurzeka said. "I also brought a different contact base to the firm. This industry is all about relationships."*

*"John figured out he couldn't beat me, so he might as well join me," Violé joked.*

*Although hit by the recession and the downturn in building projects, the company has weathered its challenges. Today, it has several major projects in the pipeline ranging from working with the California Science Center to house the retired space shuttle Endeavor to being a subcontractor on the planned parking structure project at Bob Hope Airport in Burbank.*

cally are more economical. Many times they are not appropriate for many of the buildings that we're involved in. In an aviation application, they are.

**Q:** You said the pre-engineered metal buildings are more economical. Can you be more specific?

**Violé:** On the average building they might be 10 to 15 percent less in terms of cost — up to 40 to 50 percent savings. They're energy efficient. They meet all the new energy standards, (and) they're LEED compliant. They've grown over the last 50 years. Many cities don't allow pre-engineered-type buildings because of the way they used to look. These corrugated

metal buildings were not accepted in many municipalities that had architectural review standards, so there're not always able to be used. They've grown in the last 10 to 15 years, and architecturally, they've been supplemented with more conventional skins on them — metal sidings and more conventional exterior textures and wall systems, which have basically disguised the economical structural system. We've made them more in keeping with the architectural standards a lot of cities mandate. It doesn't always work in every circumstance, but it's given us an opportunity to introduce this type of structure in other business sectors. It's a great fit for aviation.

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**Q: Will you talk a little bit about the relationship with Butler Manufacturing? Does that distributorship give your company a competitive edge when bidding projects?**

**Violé:** The Butler relationship has given us the opportunity to venture out into markets that we didn't have the opportunity to go after years ago. It gives us a competitive advantage over other general contractors that don't have a pre-engineered relationship with another supplier. So when we compete against other general contractors and it's a pre-engineered project, we have a little advantage over the other general contractors in that they have to buy a building from somebody else. It's been a good opportunity for us. T. Violé has also acted numerous times as a subcontractor to other generals. So it's given us the ability to get our name out there and get our product out there.

**Kurzeka:** Historically, Butler has not been our mainstay. We're primarily a commercial general contractor. And we have this relationship with Butler that allows us to do a lot of things. Currently, it's been very advantageous, but historically it's been 10 to 30 percent.

**Q: Can you break down your business portfolio?**

**Kurzeka:** I would say institutional projects make up about 20 percent. Industrial could be 20 to 30 percent. Regular commercial is probably the bulk of it — 30 to 40 percent. And the balance of it might be Butler projects.

**Violé:** We've done probably a dozen auto dealerships over the years. Plus, we're looking at a couple of new ones right now. And aviation over the last six, seven, eight years has been very strong. We've got four or five prospects in the aviation industry right now.

**Q: What's driving demand for aviation projects?**

**Kurzeka:** 9/11 kind of set that off. You have corporate people that don't want to be bothered with all of the (airport) security, and they have the means to afford (private charter jets). So they're creating a marketplace. All of a sudden there's the need for the NetJets of the world, Million Air, fractional ownership and these types of things.

**Violé:** It got hot, but then with the economy slowing down, it got slow again. Aviation took a dive with the economy as a whole. It's starting to come back a little bit.

**Kurzeka:** Things are turning around. We're getting more calls from different companies wanting to look at the options available.

**Q: How has the economy affected the business overall?**

**Violé:** The industry has been hard hit. Specifically, here in the Valley we lost 60 to 70 percent of our backlog in 2008-2009.

**Kurzeka:** We really felt it in 2009. It started in 2008, but our backlog carried us through 2008. Then in 2009 it was like someone turned off the faucet — it just dried up. If you look at our revenues from one year to the next, it was night and day.

**Q: How did you manage through that? There are so many companies that haven't been able to survive, or are barely hanging on today.**

**Violé:** It probably had to do with relationships.

**Kurzeka:** We saw it coming. We managed our money and employees and cut back where we needed to, and we had employees go on three days a week. They did a work share program. And the relationships we had with customers we continued. We just had smaller jobs. The big jobs weren't out there.

**Q: Are you working harder now that you've got a higher volume of smaller jobs?**

**Kurzeka:** It takes the same amount of effort to do a \$150,000 job as it does for a \$5 million job. You go through the same motions.

**Violé:** It has become more cost competitive. It's very attractive right now. People are

looking for work. When I say people, I mean general contractors and subcontractors alike. Our suppliers have all discounted prices to get product out and maintain and cover their overhead.

**Kurzeka:** The subcontractor world took a big hit, too. So it's a little bit riskier with those folks, as well.

**Q: Do you have to be more careful about who you partner with?**

**Violé:** That's exactly right. Many subcontractors are out of business. They're under very close watch.

**Kurzeka:** We really keep an eye on them, and keep a close watch, make sure that they're able to finish the job.

as closely as we have to watch our clients that are paying us. We have to make sure their bills are getting paid and they're paying the suppliers.

**Q: Is there more due diligence that goes into taking a job these days?**

**Kurzeka:** You've got to make sure your client's going to have money to pay you. It's more a timing of payment. Sometimes we get paid slower than we would like to and then that affects the subcontractor, so it's a trickle-down effect.

**Violé:** And in turn (it affects) the banks that we're dealing with. The whole banking sector was under close scrutiny after all the banking failures. So it's difficult re-establishing lines of

ect. It's probably the closest we've been to a public sector type project. It's very detailed-oriented. It's a Class A building that's had a lot of scrutiny. It'll be quite a showpiece when it's done.

**Q: Where do you see future growth coming from?**

**Kurzeka:** We keep our eyes open and look for opportunities. To the extent that we can do some of our own development, we do that, too. We're doing e-mail blasts to try to get our name (out there). We pound the pavement very hard to find work.

**Violé:** We stay close to the real estate, commercial brokerage industry, (and) we have a number of developer contacts and real estate



PHOTO COURTESY OF T. VIOLÉ CONSTRUCTION

**Build:** T. Violé has carved out a niche in building aviation projects such as hangars and fixed base operations.

### Timothy L. Violé

**TITLE:** Chairman, T. Violé Construction Co. Inc.

**COLLEGE:** B.S. in Business Administration with an emphasis in Finance. Minor in Engineering. University of Southern California.

**PERSONAL:** Married with three adult children.

### John F. Kurzeka

**TITLE:** President and CEO, T. Violé Construction Co. Inc.

**COLLEGE:** B.S. in Civil Engineering. Santa Clara University.

**PERSONAL:** Married with two adult children and one teenager.

**Violé:** We watch to see, are they paying their suppliers?

**Q: Have you been in a situation where something went bad with a subcontractor and then you had to move to Plan B?**

**Violé:** Yes, we have.

**Kurzeka:** More than once.

**Violé:** We got one right now. It's happened half a dozen times over the last couple of years. Unfortunately, it's just a sign of the times and we've got to watch our subcontractors

credit and maintaining our cash flow when the banks are also under scrutiny.

**Q: Is the economy getting any better from your view?**

**Kurzeka:** The banks are loosening up a little bit. They're not as scared.

**Violé:** A lot of clients are also developers and funding dried up, and projects dried up so it went all the way through. Banks now are looking at the contractors' qualifications very closely. They want to make sure that the general contractor that is being selected by the developer is able to pay his bills and hopefully be around for the next few years to see their project to completion. It's a tough time. We just lost a job recently. We were the No. 2 bidder on a significant project up in Malibu where the general contractor went bankrupt a month after the project started. So the owner decided to build it himself. The writing was on the wall, but they selected these folks, and sure enough, they declared bankruptcy right after they started the project.

**Q: What project would you consider your showpiece?**

**Violé:** Maybe Million Air. Million Air is the project we're currently on in San Bernardino. We have a joint venture which is the contracting entity on the project. The project involved the completion of five buildings. We're completing building number five right now. We built a hangar. We built some offices, and we built a fixed-base-operation, which is a private jet center. We're currently building an office building. The primary tenant is the U.S. Customs Patrol Border facility — we're about six months away from completing that project.

broker contacts we stay very close to.

**Q: What makes the business relationship between you work so well?**

**Kurzeka:** We complement each other. I think there's a respect for each other that we both have. We don't always agree on things, but having that base of friendship, we know we can come to an agreement.

**Q: Who has been the most inspiring person in your life?**

**Violé:** My father. He started with very simple means and grew a business that provided a comfortable lifestyle for our family.

**Kurzeka:** The same — my father — Ray Kurzeka. He worked hard and moved seven kids from Minnesota. He just uprooted and came out West. He started at a hardware store and ended up buying the business out. He bought another hardware store in Woodland Hills. He made a place for his kids to work and he put seven kids through college. He had good family values. We grew up with a lot of faith and we're all very close. I'm the youngest with five sisters and one brother. Some people say I was spoiled. Other people say it must have been rough — it was a little of both.

**Q: What do you want your company legacy to be?**

**Violé:** Reputation is everything. We try and instill that mindset in our employees.

**Kurzeka:** We enjoy building and... in seeing people use the finished product. We take a lot of pride in workmanship in making sure it's done right. In the Valley we go by and we see these facilities quite a bit. We put our name on them. We want them to look good.