

The business of strengthening structures

By **Brian Franks**
Business Journal Writer

As a child, Greg Riley's two main interests in life were architecture and ice hockey.

But because he was not drafted into the National Hockey League after high school, Riley decided to pursue a career in architecture.

After a year of community college and work experience, Riley, who enjoys turning his conceptual designs into reality, got the entrepreneurial itch as he began dreaming of his own architecture firm.

"At 19, I knew that someday I would own my own firm," he said.

Some time later, Riley transferred to Cal Poly San Luis Obispo where he switched his architectural dream to an engineering future.

"I had the aptitude to do architectural design," he said. "I could make (buildings) stand up, but I could not make them look good."

Upon completion of his engineering degree, Riley temporarily put his entrepreneurial dream on hold to gain needed work experience at a handful of Southern California engineering firms from the mid-1980s to the late-1990s. By 1997,



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Over the last five years Greg Riley of Valencia has transformed his entrepreneurial venture from a \$50,000 a year solo operation to a million dollar structural engineering firm.

Riley had taken a few business classes, received his engineering license and felt he had enough experience to begin the process of starting his own firm.

In October 1998, he used less than \$10,000 of his savings to launch The Structural Engineering Consultants Inc. out of his home in Valencia.

Structural Engineering Consultants

was originally designed to specialize in residential projects including tract developments, custom and multi-family homes, low-rise commercial buildings and business parks, and foundation engineering.

"Once I started, the tricky part was to find work," he said. "The first year was rough. When I left my job, my income

was my family's only income."

After becoming licensed nationwide, Riley soon got enough work to earn \$50,000 his first year in business.

"The problem then became that the only way to make the company more successful was to get more employees and grow," he said.

In December 1999, Riley moved his business into an office on Lyons Avenue and he hired two employees.

Two years later, he hired three more employees, moved into a large office on Tourney Road, and expanded his service to include seismic retrofit and repair of all types of existing structures.

After recently hiring two more employees, Riley, 41, said his company is on target to make \$1 million in revenues this year.

"Everything we've done has been based on cash flow. We've grown by staying out of debt," he said.

Over the next ten years, he said he plans on tripling the current size of his business before retiring.

"I hired back my life. Now when I go home, it is the exception to bring work with me, not the rule. The more people I've brought on board, the easier it has been for me," he said. "It allows me to focus on what I want to do."