

# Executive edge: Rhonda Maas

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By Lynn Bronikowski

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As a child, Rhonda Maas would run cattle on her family's Western Slope ranch homesteaded by her grandfather. There was no running water or electricity in the log cabin that was heated with a woodstove. She loved every moment of it.

"It was always beautiful in the summertime. It was a good, dirty time when we learned to chainsaw lumber, chop wood, ride horses and run cattle," said Maas, president of Building Restoration Specialties Inc. in Denver. "In that cabin I came to appreciate the craftsmanship of our forefathers and seeing the hard work that went into building it - all without power tools."

Maas would go on to co-found Building Restoration Specialties in 1986 - a company that helped to fix or repair about 85 percent of old buildings in Lower Downtown. Her company recently completed restoration of the City and County Building, and cleaned and restored the sandstone structures in Denver's Civic Center.

"There are historic buildings everywhere, including old mining towns where structures need to be restored," said Maas, whose company has completed several hundred projects over 25 years and posts annual revenue in excess of \$3 million. "It's a very rewarding experience to be part of our history and instill pride in all our workers."

When she started her business, Lower Downtown was a sea of vacancy with developers and architects eying old warehouses for Building Restoration to transform into lofts.

"We've grown through the tough times, and we continue to grow each year because restoration is our niche," said Maas, whose company also does new construction projects such as the Skyline Park facilities in downtown Denver and the Cheesman Dam pump house in Deckers. "We can do new projects as well as old so it gives us more options."

Building Restoration Specialties, which employs 35, evaluates how the original craftsmen constructed a building a century ago and endeavors to replicate their techniques and materials. When it came to the Civic Center project, it meant calling quarries across the U.S. to find sandstone that matched the stones used in the park's various structures.

"We're big on recycling," said Maas, 46. "With all the demolition that goes on in this country - those materials that went into those buildings are precious to people like me. We're fortunate in Denver to have two salvage yards that capitalize on demolishing buildings and then salvaging the materials and selling them. Even old bricks from a torn-down garage are a precious resource, as it's very costly to get a manufacturing plant to make old brick."

Like that child on the ranch, Maas today is not afraid to get her hands dirty. Last summer she spent 14-hour days over a weekend power washing the Denver Mint with chemicals and making mortar repairs.

"I was covered in mortar dust and had pebbles in my hair," Maas said. "But I like doing the work - mostly to show the guys that I can still do the work and that I might know something they don't know. I also get to evaluate the crew by working side by side with them."

The mother of two sons and a daughter, Maas has been known to drive around Denver pointing out buildings she's restored. She even had her daughter climb the scaffolding of the City and County Building to pet the gold-leafed eagle atop.

"If you have an opportunity like that - to touch the top of a cool building - you take it," Maas said. "It's about our legacy - my leaving a legacy and instilling in my children a good and honest work ethic."

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