Ross Bunchek is a four-time all-American weight and hammer thrower with a bachelor’s degree in mathematics and a master’s in exercise science.

So, of course, he became an estimator. If you’re shaking your head, you’re not alone.

“I was the typical construction kid,” Bunchek said. “I loved going on-site with my dad, seeing the earth work and excavation, seeing them tear apart buildings. I loved it, but I always has an affinity for mathematics. It just clicked for me.”

He considered careers in engineering and research mathematics, but nothing seemed to fit. So, he spent his college summers on-site, working as a laborer, a carpenter and, of all things, an estimator, and his school semesters focusing on the numbers, figuring the rest would sort itself out.

And it did, just not in any way he ever imagined thanks to a detour into track and field, something Bunchek “just happened to pick up” during his time at Carthage College in Kenosha.

An offer as an academic graduate assistant led him to Nebraska, where Bunchek ranked third in the nation as a thrower, earned his master’s degree met his wife, Victoria, a Big 12 hammer throw champion, who now works as a science teacher.

By 2010, Bunchek was done with academic life. But, with the economy still bruised and his wife still in school, he took a job with as a healthy living director at a YMCA in Indiana.

It wasn’t until earlier this year, when he joined Mortenson, that Bunchek said, “It was time for me to get into what I wanted to do.”

The fact that he landed in estimating still amazes Bunchek.

“Looking back as a kid, if you had told me this is where I’d end up and what I wanted to do, I’d have laughed at you. I always said a desk job wasn’t what I wanted. And I never would have guessed this is something I could have gotten into from a mathematics background. But I definitely kind of hit the lottery.”

ROSS BUNCHEK
LAYING DOWN THE HAMMER

Mortenson’s Bunchek never underestimated a career in construction

Jessica Stephen
Special to The Daily Reporter

Ross Bunchek: I’ve been very surprised at just how into the details I get. I’ve always been a detail-oriented person, but estimating to me greatly resembles doing a very intricate mental puzzle. The fact that he landed in estimating still amazes Bunchek.

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What surprises you most about your work?

Ross Bunchek: I’ve been very surprised at just how into the details I get. I’ve always been a detail-oriented person, but estimating to me greatly resembles doing a very intricate mental puzzle. On the outside it appears to be repetitive and even somewhat mindless: input the data, adjust for productivity, create the presentation documents, always following the same steps from job to job. But it’s so much more than that. Once you truly get into the work, you find yourself getting lost in it. And I absolutely mean that in a good way.

The Daily Reporter: What would you change about the construction industry?

Bunchek: That’s difficult to say, especially with my limited amount of personal experience. However, having watched my father be involved in the industry for almost 40 years, and I’d say the work-life balance can be the most difficult part. Construction often means time apart from your loved ones, be it in the form of traveling to a job or staying late to meet a deadline. Hard work definitely pays off in this industry, both personally and from a company perspective, but that often comes with a price. If I could change anything, I would make it so that everyone involved from the top executive to the newest trade apprentice could spend more time with those closest to them.

TDR: What other job(s) did you consider trying?

Bunchek: I had such a roundabout way of getting here. During my undergrad years I considered being a research mathematician or engineer, then in graduate school I did a full 180 and explored sports performance and strength and conditioning. For a while after that I really wanted to be a collegiate track and field or strength and conditioning coach, and I even spent some time working in management for a YMCA. But I always kept my eyes on the construction industry. When the economy started to recover I decided it might be a good time to explore my career options again and I happened to really like what I saw in the industry, so here I am!

TDR: What profession would you not like to explore?

Bunchek: Being an actuary, a politician or a traveling salesman.

TDR: If you could change one thing about yourself, what would it be?

Bunchek: Physically, I’d either ask for better knees or losing a few pounds. I’m a former collegiate athlete and my body’s taken quite a beating over time. Personality-wise, I wouldn’t want to completely change this, but I’d make me just a bit less of a perfectionist. I’m the kind of person who holds on to mistakes way too long (as in months), even small ones. It drives my wife nuts.

TDR: What would your colleagues be surprised to know about you?

Bunchek: I’m a big teddy bear at heart. I may be a bigger guy who has tattoos and rides a motorcycle, but put me in front of a puppy and I melt like butter.