

Bokeh Development

When orthopedic physician assistant Michael Ramsey sent his children to college on the condition that they choose universities located in diverse urban areas, he didn't know it would change his life too. The plan to broaden their horizons beyond an upper-middle-class Midwestern childhood worked — until he realized they didn't consider their hometown a viable option for living and working after completing their studies.

"They said, 'Dad, we can't live in Wichita,'" Ramsey shares. "'We'd have to buy a car, live somewhere less cool than we are now — basically go back on everything you taught us.' Wichita has had a hard time competing with larger metropolitan areas because we weren't offering downtown living."

Ramsey saw the challenge as an opportunity and formed Bokeh Development with his long-time business partner and medical colleague, surgeon Robert Eyster. The two began pursuing projects that allowed them to contribute directly to a new vision for Downtown. People often ask how Ramsey transitioned from orthopedic surgery to urban development. He says the two fields are more similar than they first appear.

"Orthopedics is about building good foundations," Ramsey said. "In medicine, we're building knees and hips and ankles, when we translate that to construction, we're still looking at what we can build on."

Even the name of their company captures the unique perspective of their investments. "Bokeh" is the Japanese photographic term for the aspects of an image that are out of focus — the blurred edges where light and color aren't quite defined.

"We try to find value and interest in things that aren't in focus for most people," Ramsey explains. "We try to see the possibilities and enhance the areas around us. Even if we're not going to develop that building right now, we put in a placeholder that adds something to the space."

For example, the Pop-Up Urban Park converted a bare construction site into a temporary community gathering place while more permanent plans are under development. Working alongside researchers and community leaders, following the guidelines of the city's Master Plan, Bokeh's projects capture the energy of Downtown, targeting key zones for growth.

"We're really trying to set anchors," Ramsey said. "We are always thoughtful with our progression."

The Lux, Renfro, and Zelman Lofts offer apartments or condos with main-floor commercial spaces. The COrTen building houses several offices with a shared conference room. Plans are in progress to remodel the historic Broadway Autopark into unique residences and offices. A data-driven investor, Ramsey understands that his dreams must function within reality, so he keeps his inspirations close at hand.

"That's why I moved Downtown," Ramsey explains. "There's nothing better than being at eye level to understand the nuances of a place. We benefit from the success of these businesses when we listen and respond to their needs."