

# He sets goals and meets them, no matter what

TAYLOR HENDERSON  
RACES TO BUILD A HABITAT  
HOME ON EVERY CONTINENT  
— BEFORE TURNING 30



**WHETHER HE'S TENDING GOAL FOR HIS FAVORITE PASTIME, lacrosse, or building a house for Habitat for Humanity, whatever Taylor Henderson sets his sights on getting done, he does — with calm, measured, thoughtful and unswerving determination, and a little humility thrown into the mix.**

While the Dow Solar account manager never actually decided to make a career in the housing industry, he's been around it his entire life. The only child of a single parent, his mother is a consultant in the affordable housing industry, first in San Francisco (where he lived until he was 12), then in Austin, Texas, where he grew up (and she still lives).

## **Mom shapes his long-lasting values**

She's also behind his values and ethics. "I grew up watching my mom work late hours," Henderson said. "She always went the extra distance and set the bar to make sure things were done well. And if you do them right the first time, it works out better in the long term. That's formed a baseline for me and she has a lot of the ideals I find in myself today."

While in junior high school, Henderson played goalie in both ice and roller hockey. That interest morphed into a passion for playing goalie in lacrosse, where he was an early adopter of the sport in Austin. "I really found a love for the sport, the team dynamic and the community associated with it as a whole," he said. "I'm an avid supporter of the Denver Outlaws and the Colorado Mammoth."

## **Searches soul for meaningful career**

Henderson attended Villanova in Philadelphia, where he was graduated with a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering in 2005. During his senior year, he began to narrow his focus on a career he could "wake up and be really excited about what I go to do every day," he said. "So I spent a lot of time soul searching."





Left: Henderson founded the Denver Habitat Young Professionals as a way for Denver's young professionals to become better engaged with their community and one another. Building four duplexes in three days, this was the biggest HYP build to date.

This page: On the cliff's edge of Table Mountain at the South Africa Habitat for Humanity build, Henderson poses with the family, build team and other local volunteers.

It was about that time the sustainability conversation garnered national attention. "As I worked to find a job that I could really be excited about going to every day, sustainability continued to rise to the forefront and I began to network in the industry."

One night, while working a part-time retail job, he had a conversation with a GE exec, who suggested that if Henderson was serious about renewable energy and sustainability, he ought to go to Pittsburgh for the American Wind Energy Association's conference. "I got up the gumption, went to that conference and handed out résumés," Henderson said. "Sometimes, when you go out on a limb, there are these signs that you're doing the right thing — and that was certainly the case in this instance." After a few seconds, he added, "And it's always felt like as I follow a path toward looking for greater good, good comes from it."

### Wind industry launches sustainability career

Being there led to an offer from Gamesa Energy USA, a subsidiary of one of the largest wind turbine manufacturers in the world. As part of the wind farm development team, Henderson — who had returned to Austin for the job — developed wind farms across the southwestern United States.

After a year, he worked for Renewable Energy Systems (RES) Americas, which develops wind energy and builds wind farms. "I could walk down the hall and talk to a project manager who's constructing a wind farm and really take a project from A to Z," Henderson explained. "It was the first time that I had an avenue to really see the construction industry, other than doing mechanical engineering in college."

He was part of a small team that broadened RES Americas' focus to include large utility solar development — his entry into solar. "We all had to wear a lot of different hats and it was very entrepreneurial." Henderson worked with wind energy estimators to develop solar project estimates and budgets for hundreds of acres of solar and thousands of acres of wind facilities. What's more, the company was relocating its headquarters to Colorado. "It was a move I was very happy to make," he said.

### Sustainability focus turns to solar — and homebuilders

He had been working for RES Americas for more than three years when he was approached by Aaron Nitzen, national sales director with Dow Solar. A new division of Dow, Nitzen was challenged with launching a building integrated solar product. He chose to launch it in Colorado first. "I had watched the residential solar market grow at pretty unprecedented rates." Henderson observed. "The wind industry was stabilized and I thought it'd be a great time to transition."

He added, "I thought, of all places, Colorado would be a place that homebuilders would be willing to have the solar sustainability conversation. Dow is willing to approach it not only from the solar standpoint, but also from the energy efficient perspective. For me, it makes the whole opportunity attractive."

### Footloose and fancy free — for now

Henderson is single, and enjoys watching his friends' lives change, one by one, to marriage and parenthood. "I'm at that point in life where everybody's getting married and having kids. I think Facebook makes it a lot more interesting to watch," he laughed.

He's captivated with Colorado's outdoor lifestyle, and is an avid runner. He enjoys running around some of Denver's parks for fun, as well as in marathons. He also likes to ski, play lacrosse and hockey, go to professional sporting events, hang out with friends and read.

### Real passion? Building Habitat for Humanity homes

Yet if you ask him where his real passion lies, he'd say building homes for Habitat for Humanity. It all started innocently enough, while he was at Villanova, the largest university Habitat participant in the country.

"I was surrounded by people who were doing a number of projects — whether it be Habitat for Humanity or volunteering with underprivileged kids from the Philadelphia area," Henderson said. "I realized that whether here in the US or on a global level, we're

extremely fortunate. Villanova taught me that you really have the ability to make a tangible impact on the world with your life.”

Actually, his mother taught him that first; Villanova reinforced it. Because his mother emphasized service, he volunteered at a children’s hospital while in high school. “I’ve always felt I wanted to give back in some small way. I’ve also found that in giving back, my life becomes a little more meaningful, is a little more exciting and good things just seem to happen. So I’m always inclined to follow that path,” Henderson said.

Because of Villanova’s high participation level, it was easy for Henderson to volunteer with Habitat for Humanity Philadelphia. During his junior year, a friend planned a trip to build a Habitat home in Cape Town, South Africa, for which Henderson led the fundraising efforts.

### Goal: Habitat build on each continent — before age 30

At the same time, he read about a woman who led an organization in Philadelphia, Back on My Feet, which gives homeless people running shoes, “gets them out running in the mornings with professionals, and works to integrate them into the working world,” Henderson said.

“Her personal goal stood out to me: She wanted to run a marathon on every continent.” Henderson said. While on a trip in Kuching Malaysia, Borneo, “her personal goal of running a marathon on every continent stuck with me. I decided it’d be great to do a Habitat build on every continent before the age of 30.”

With that goal front and center and two continents under his belt, he signed up for leadership training through the Habitat for Humanity Global Village program. As a trip participant, he built another home in Santiago, Chile in 2010. Last year, Henderson led his first Habitat trip to Rotorua, New Zealand.

“This year, I’ll lead the Habitat build on the last of six continents to Comanesti, Romania in August.” Yes, he knows there are seven continents, but, he joked, “they haven’t branched out to Antarctica yet.”

### Created Habitat Young Professional group in Denver

Between building homes and getting leadership training, he also formed a young professionals group at Habitat for Humanity of Metro Denver, called Habitat for Young Professionals (HYP) in 2010. When he got to Colorado, Henderson liked that there were many terrific organizations that had an active young professionals group. However, he said, “there were only a couple that let young professionals be hands on, rather than just fundraising, in terms of their volunteerism.”

So he took what he knew about Habitat and created HYP, “in the hopes of getting folks out to Habitat worksites, as well as growing their personal networks. HYP now has 40 members. And more than just going out to build a home and network with one another,



Top: Henderson led his first Habitat team on the build in New Zealand last fall. His mother, Mary, joined him and is standing, with sunglasses on. “I was really excited that she could join us on that trip,” he said. “Over the two years leading up to that build, she had a near life-ending heart attack and hip replacement. It meant a lot for her to join me on that trip.”



Left: In Chile, nine-year-old Michael — who has cerebral palsy — had been abandoned by his parents to live with his grandparents, also shown here. Henderson worked on an addition to their home and said, “Michael’s grandfather possessed a work ethic I’ve rarely encountered.”

HYP asks its members to donate \$20 every month to Habitat. Last year, HYP got a \$10,000 matching grant from State Farm, creating \$20,000 in donations to Habitat for Humanity of Metro Denver.

“We built — and I will count this as my North America Habitat build — the first-ever Denver HYP house, along with the Villanova Alumni Group, in Westminster,” Henderson said. “And in early March, we had our largest build in terms of volunteers — 50 participants — building four sets of duplexes on one day.” Oh, and he’ll celebrate his 30th birthday next April, well after his Romanian build.

### His real reward is a stable home’s impact on a child

Although it seems that Henderson’s passion is for building and swinging a hammer, he said the reward for him is in watching the impact a home has on a child. “You put a child in a stable living situation and it’s statistically proven that their grades will become better. Stability will play a role in their self confidence.”

That brought him back to his first trip to South Africa, where he saw children playing soccer, barefoot, in a field littered with rocks and broken glass. “I’ve never seen joy like I did on those kids’ faces,” he said. “So often, we get focused on what we don’t have and I think Habitat is a way for me to center myself around the work that’s left to be done in the world.”

Henderson added, “I’m very fortunate to have a well-paying job. There are a lot of heroes here in Denver and all around the world who are working without a lot of attention to make the world a better place. To me, that is very humbling.”