For many years, Rob Croxall was on a straight and narrow path. His success in high school baseball brought him to Cal Poly, where the right-hander pitched for the Mustangs from 1992 to 1995.

During that time, he studied finance at the Orfalea College of Business and went on to earn his master’s degree in industrial technology. The next step came naturally: managing finance for a leading aerospace firm in Southern California for more than 10 years.

Croxall’s linear path toward success had led him right where it was supposed to go. “I had great career opportunities and my career was on track, but I felt I was just passing time,” he said. “I felt there was more out there for me, so I made a change and took a risk.”

In 2010, Croxall decided to throw a curveball and turn his favorite hobby, home brewing hop-centric beers, into a full-time job. With his Learn by Doing spirit in full force, he entered the Master Brewers Program at UC Davis and hired cicerone Tom Kelley. Thanks to help from Croxall’s family, including his father Dick, his brother Dan (B.S. English ‘99; M.A. English ‘01), and a small group of well-connected, local partners, the team soon raised the money to establish a brewery on Main Street in El Segundo, Calif.

While it may seem like a big leap to go from aerospace to brewing, Croxall says that he continues to employ lessons learned at Cal Poly and in aerospace today. “Scheduling, cost modeling, forecasting [were] all things I learned in my time at aerospace companies,” he said. “The experience was invaluable.”

El Segundo Brewing Co.’s first line of flavorful craft beers, some named Blue House Ales after the color of the Croxall home nearby, began flowing in local tap rooms in 2011 to rave reviews. From the start, the brewery captured the unique flavor of West Coast-style India Pale Ales (IPA), a style that’s been honored among the best at beer competitions throughout the state.

Five years later, Croxall has used his business acumen to scale operations up quickly, now serving more than 950 accounts in Southern California and nationwide. He manages a team of four full-time brewery staff and 20 support personnel, including sales and marketing, distribution, and taproom staff. The brewery has also pushed the boundaries of freshness in the industry, pioneering the Day One program that bottles and trucks beer to local pubs from Ventura to San Diego the same day.

The brewery is committed to freshness through its entire line of products. According to Croxall, “Bottled On” dates stand front and center on the label. Batches are designed to be on and off shelves within six weeks — and if by chance beer gets to the 90-day mark, the team pulls it from shelves and replaces it with a fresh product.

“This whole experience has been a study in the Cal Poly Learn by Doing philosophy.”

— Rob Croxall, Founder of El Segundo Brewing Co.