In the Shadow of a Reputation

Brewer maintains original values while building Smith’s Company

BY KEN DENNEY
The Times Georgian

Tim Brewer recalls that he was named head of Addison Smith’s employees within seven years of the company’s founding. Brewer said, "I don’t do this by the book, but I’m going to make it work for me.

Brewer is now president of the mechanical contracting company that Smith began nearly 60 years ago. The company retains the name and Smith’s core values of excellence, but Brewer has not been a caretaker of the founder’s legacy. The firm has vastly expanded in number of employees and diversity of services.

Smith was born and grew up in West Georgia and served with the 9th Naval Construction Battalion (the Seabees) during World War II. In that era, mechanical contracting was a more diverse field with contractors involved in plumbing, heating and air conditioning. Smith was expected to be master of all trades. The mechanical firm needed Smith to be a jack of all trades.

Smith's specialty was the company's financial and marketing teams. Smith worked with his co-workers and led the team to success.

Smith started his business out of his home in 1954, and it grew rapidly. The forward-thinking Smith worked out of a uniquely contemporary building that still stands at 3356 Bremen Highway. Smith’s company has been known for its unique, identifiable structures across town.

Brewer got to know Smith before he was elected to the company board. Brewer said, "I don’t have the luxury of being a partner," Brewer added. "I’ve got to keep the company running.

I came in with the intention of being a partner,"said Brewer. However, the family offered to sell him the company in the interest of growing it in new directions. "It was a mutually beneficial thing, because they were looking for someone to continue Smith’s legacy.

Brewer has been running the company since 1994. It is now located on Kingsbridge Drive, only a few miles from the old Bremen Highway address— and it is in the market for even bigger space.

Brewer grew up in Columbus, but began working as an engineer with Smith’s firm.

Brewer is known for his forward-thinking approach, which often results in unique, identifiable structures across town.

Addison Smith (1922-1988) started his plumbing and heating contracting firm from his home in 1954. Today, the company still bears his name and does business across the South.

Addison Smith's company income was "a no-brainer," he said, because of the reputation the firm had established. The company has expanded significantly, and now employs 80 people, all skilled craftsmen in their own right, and has seven different divisions covering all aspects of plumbing and heating, air conditioning, including inspection and servicing of equipment.

The company does most of its business with institutions — schools, colleges and public buildings as well as large industrial plants, but it also has a division to service residential heating and air. It recently merged with Dollar Heating and Air to help expand that end of the business.

Brewer’s main reason for having so many divisions is to leverage their income.

"One thing I recognize early on, if you don’t have more than one revenue stream in the bad times, it’s going to be very difficult,

so you need to have multiple revenue streams to get through the bad times. But the plan has also been to diversify the company in other ways. Brewer cited several examples of one division of the company helping to bring in new business for another division. Some of these have taken the company into some strange directions. For example, the company’s industrial group was commissioned to build a gigantic turbine which is used in a public square in Albany to rotate a massive bronze statue of hometown hero Ray Charles. Brewer said that only shows the talents of his skilled crew.

They’re all tradesmen. The skill set that these guys possess, to some degree, is a dying art. There’s not that many of these guys that are out there anymore that can really do what these guys can do.

The company works to instill core values of "honesty, integrity, character, exceeding expectations, accountability and peak performance" to create a team of local professionals who can do the same kind of work as any other contractor in the metro area.

Although Brewer did not know Addison Smith well enough to know how the founder of the company ran the business, he believes Smith would approve of the directions the company has taken — and especially the company’s dedication to quality, professional work.

"What I have is that shadow of his reputation. That’s what I do have. I wish I had that voice in my head saying, hey, these are the right things to do. Certainly the shadow of his reputation is what I try to live up to.

ADDISON SMITH
Mechanical Contractor, Inc.

Pat Cusick, left a design engineer, and Gary Monrue, right, a project engineer, look over some engineering drawings at the company’s new headquarters on Kingsbridge Drive.

The forward-thinking Smith worked out of his unique Quonset building on the Bremen Highway. It is still standing today, one of the most unique structures in Carrollton.

Ricky Stilley/Times Georgian

Tim Brewer was asked to take over the company by Addison Smith’s family in 1994. Today it has 80 employees and seven divisions.

Ricky Stilley/Times Georgian

Artie reported courtesy of The Times Georgian

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