

# 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 once saw one of Addison Smith's employees carefully tucking and wrapping some insulation that would soon be hidden forever behind a wall. He complimented the man on his work, but told him the extra precision was not necessary.

"Well, Addison is going to see this," the man replied. "If I don't do it this way, he's going to make me do it again."

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 value of excellence, but Brewer has not been only 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 92nd Naval Construction Battalion

(the Seabees) during World War II. In that era, mechanical contracting was a more diverse field; while there are now specialists in plumbing, heating and air, men like Smith were expected to be master of all trades. The mechanically minded Smith was particularly suited to the work, and his eye for neatness and precision extended into his personal life.

"Every time you saw him he had on a coat and tie, starched shirt — he was dressed to the nines," said Brewer. "But he'd go to job sites and have his coveralls and boots so he wouldn't get dirty when he'd get out and do the inspections."

Smith started his business out of his home in 1954 and it grew rapidly. The forward-thinking Smith was soon working out of a uniquely contemporary building that still stands at 1395 Bremen Highway. Smith apparently enjoyed working on projects that involved sleek, mid-century designs, and Brewer says Smith's legacy can be found in easily identifiable structures across town.

Brewer got to know Smith toward the end of his life, when Brewer was with another company working with Smith's firm at a project in Newnan. Afterwards, they worked on a few other projects together. A few years after Smith died in 1988, he was approached by Smith's widow and daughter, who were then running the company.

"I came in with the intentions of being a partner," he said. However, the family offered to sell him the company in the interest of growing it in new directions. "It was a mutually beneficial



Ricky Stille/Times-Georgian

Tim Brewer was asked to take over the company by Addison Smith's family in 1994. Today it has 86 employees and seven divisions.

thing, because they were really looking for someone to continue Addison'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 is in the market for even bigger space.

Brewer grew up in Columbus, but began working as an engineer with Southwire when he graduated from college.

After a few years, he took a job with another engineering firm and that is when he got to know Smith. By the time the offer came to take over Smith's business, he was looking for a change of careers.

Keeping the Addison Smith name was "a no-brainer," he said, because of the reputation the firm had established. But while the company only had four employees when he took over, Brewer has expanded it significantly. It now employs 86 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 recognized early on, if you don't have more than one revenue stream in the bad times, it's going to be very difficult;



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



Ricky Stille/Times-Georgian

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

so you need to have multiple revenue streams to get through the bad times."

But the plan has also benefited 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 turntable 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.



HVAC Services

Addison Smith has extensive experience servicing and installing all types of HVAC and refrigeration systems — ranging from small DX systems to large water-cooled chillers.



- ✓ **Service**
- ✓ **Maintenance**
- ✓ **HVAC-Plumbing**
- ✓ **Projects**
- ✓ **Solutions**