

Norwalk-based roofing business keeps alive family legacy

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Rick Tavella doesn't go up ladders these days carrying roofing shingles, but he is carrying on a family tradition. Tavella has been in the roofing business for 32 years, entering the field with his father's company.

"I started working with my dad in 1975. He started Main Roofing in 1948. In 2001, my dad passed away so my brother and I ran it. In 2003, my brother and I split and I started Rick's Main Roofing," Tavella said.

Roofing has come a long way since the early days, said Tavella, who continues to keep up to date with new products and procedures in the industry.

Recently, Tavella's company was honored with GAF Master Elite Installation Excellence Award from GAF Material Corp., one of the largest roofing materials manufacturers in North America. Tavella has won this accolade several times since the award's inception in 2000.

What has changed about the industry?

There's a lot of competition. Everybody wants to be a roofer, we call them "Pete in a Pick-Up." They work out of their house and don't have the proper insurance.

This year, the roofing industry business has gone down 30 percent - I don't know why. Hopefully we'll make it up and get back business we lost during the spring.

How have you been doing during this time?

I've been maintaining (business) and I've been fortunate that I haven't had to lay anybody off. Being a smaller company than I used to be, it's easier to keep guys.

Do you do commercial work as well as residential? If so, what's the breakdown of those two segments?

I'd say it's 60 percent residential and 40 percent commercial.

What are the roofing options you offer?

We're doing tile. We just did a large wood roof and a large slate roof. We also do a lot of special copper work.

What's your busy season and what do you do in the downtime?

Our busy season is Labor Day to almost Christmas. It's pretty quiet through the winter, then it picks up again from tax time in April through June. July and August are quiet because people go away.

In the downtime, we do marketing for the upcoming season, and if it's a bad winter we do emergency calls. I offer emergency repair services 24 hours a day, seven days a week. I sleep with my phone and my wife hates it.

How do people learn about your roofing business and marketing?

Mostly through word-of-mouth and our reputation. We also have a lot of trucks on the road.

I spent a lot of money on marketing this year. I was on the radio for six weeks to promote our new financing program and my Web site.

Is there ongoing training for the GAF status?

There's ongoing training and they spend a lot of money on research and development. They usually have a seminar once a year. I also belong to the Northeast Roofing Contractors Association.

What areas do you primarily serve?

Fairfield County and I'm licensed and insured in New York. We're working on a job right now in Westchester County.

How many employees do you have?

Right now, about 11 people and I have subcontractors.

What are your future plans?

To stay small and stay efficient, to be controllable and not be so big that you don't know who your clients are.

I'm also in the process of opening a small division in Florida.

- At Work With regularly appears in The Advocate and Greenwich Time. Do you know of an interesting job or have one yourself? Tell us about it. Please contact Harold Davis at 964-2277 or e-mail harold.davis@scni.com.

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