

JAMES RIVER EXTERIORS



TEAMWORK AND FAMILY ATMOSPHERE KEEPS VIRGINIA FIRM PROFITING IN TROUBLED ECONOMY

by Katie Gutierrez Painter

SHANE BURNETTE, VICE PRESIDENT OF James River Exteriors in Richmond, VA, never expected to go into the contracting business, least of all, the family contracting business. Founded in 2004, James River Exteriors is a division of James River Stucco, Inc., and both companies are owned and run by Mike Chaney, Burnette's stepfather. Yet long before Chaney separated the companies for insurance reasons, Burnette was already a fixture at the original firm. "I have worked in the company in some capacity since I was 13 years old," says

Burnette. "At the time, I never thought it would be a career and I actually resented the fact that [my brother and I] had to work in the company. But looking back, it taught us more about ourselves, hard work, and life in general, than any formal education I received."

Upon his college graduation in 2001, Burnette joined James River Stucco officially as a member of the sales staff. In the next few years, he was promoted to production manager, then division manager, before reaching his current

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AT A GLANCE

LOCATION: Richmond, VA

AREA OF SPECIALTY:
Exterior contractor

EMPLOYEES: 90

PROJECTED 2008
REVENUE INCREASE: 15%

SERVICES:

Siding, stonework, hardscapes,
stucco & dryvit, caulking/sealants,
repair/maintenance



position. In the same few years, Chaney and Burnette decided to establish a new division for the company: James River Exteriors. “We visualized ourselves installing all types of exteriors and wanted a name that made sense to our customers,” explains Burnette.

Today, with the goal of providing an exterior cladding one-stop-shop for building owners, homeowners, and residential builders, James River Exteriors operates on several unique principals. The first: “selling smart.” Burnette explains, “We aren’t going to try and sell you based on price, or some high-pressure sales tactic. We are going to try and provide you as much information as possible so that you can make an informed decision for yourself.”

Included in the concept of selling smart is ensuring that all 90 James River Exteriors employees, which includes subcontractors, are experts in their field. The company also specializes in water

management, and according to Burnette, every person in the organization has attended some form of building science seminar to thoroughly understand how water interacts with the building envelope. In addition, the company engages monthly speakers, and encourages employees to attend training seminars and national trade shows. “Anything that can provide [employees] with a better understanding of what it is they are doing is certainly going to benefit them and us,” Burnette says.

The company’s second operating principal: teamwork. Burnette explains that working as a TEAM (Together Everyone Achieves More) is rooted in being a family business. In 2006, Burnette’s younger brother Brian joined the company, and today serves as another vice president. Brian, too, worked with his stepfather from the age of 12.

“The family dynamic brings a lot of challenges to the business, but it also has a

lot of rewards,” shares the elder Burnette. “Sometimes it isn’t as comfortable saying what you want to say to a family member because you care about them as people first and business people second. It is a lot easier to talk openly with a boss whose feelings you don’t care about, than to have a candid conversation with someone who you are going to go to dinner with later that night.” Burnett adds, “The challenge is balancing your business interests with your personal interests, and having the patience to see the light at the end of the tunnel.”

Working with family has also helped the business partners hone their employee recruiting process. Most current employees have some type of personal connection to former teammates, says Burnette. “We are also one of the companies that look for athletes,” he adds. “We have found that athletic experience prepares you for this business environment better than any other type of job experience, or education you may have

had. The competitive, winner-take-all mentality typically leads to success in this business. In addition, the spirit of teamwork goes a long way.”

The company’s operating principles have proven successful. Since 2001, volume has doubled twice, and despite the present downturn in the housing market, Burnette expects a 15 percent increase in gross revenue in 2008. He attributes part of this to a relatively unorthodox marketing strategy. “A lot of companies cut down their marketing budgets to razor thin numbers during down times, and we have elected to do the opposite,” says Burnette. “During down times there seems to be less noise in the marketplace, and it seems like a great time to deliver your mes-

sage and tell your story.”

The firm’s recent marketing efforts have included a revamped Web site, a new logo, a full-scale television advertising campaign, and participation in the local NBC affiliate’s *Best on the Block* show, a reality TV-based contest similar to *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition*. In the next year, shares Burnette, the company aims to open its first satellite office, as well as actively expand into other markets. But, Burnette adds, the company will do nothing without extensive thought and planning. “We are trying to create a company that we can transplant into any market and expect a certain level of success,” he says. “You can’t do that until you have everything identified that makes you successful.” ABQ



Above: Shane Burnette, vice president.

“We aren’t going to try and sell you based on price, or some high-pressure sales tactic.” *Shane Burnette, Vice President*

