

2020 Commercial Contractor of the Year: Empire Roofing



BUILDING AN EMPIRE



By: Chris Gray

Empire Roofing President Ronnie McGlothlin started in the roofing industry at age 13 and began Empire Roofing in 1982. It grew from being a small subcontractor to having 14 locations throughout the country. Photo by Jill Bloom.

RONNIE MCGLOTHLIN / EMPIRE ROOFING
SELECTED AS ROOFING CONTRACTOR
MAGAZINE COMMERCIAL CONTRACTOR OF
THE YEAR

Congratulations to Ronnie McGlothlin and Empire Roofing for receiving this well-deserved award.

Below is a reprint of the article telling all about the award and the success story of Ronnie and Empire Roofing.

Again, congratulations to Ronnie and everyone at Empire that has made that company so successful.

Ronnie has been a strong supporter of MRCA and currently serves as Chairman of the MRCA Membership Committee; and is a member of the MRCA Board of Directors. Ronnie served as MRCA President in 2010.

Ronnie McGlothlin worked for his father as a laborer at the age of 13, moving up to become a traveling foreman at the age of 18 and then a superintendent. By the time he was in his early 20s, he was making more money than ever, was just married, and drove a 1978 Trans Am he paid for himself. But something felt off.

Deep down, he knew the roofing industry could be better. A year-and-a-half later, he set out to make it happen, and when he told his bosses he was quitting, he received all the inspiration he needed.

"I gave them my two-week notice and they were kind of smart asses about it and said, 'Well, I think we pay you too much money, you can come back begging for a job,'" he said. "If I ever had any motivation ever in my life, it was like, 'I wasn't going back.'"

That was the impetus McGlothlin and his wife, Sandra Sedillo-McGlothlin, needed to form Empire Roofing in 1982, selling the beloved Trans Am to make it happen. Initially working as a subcontractor, he and Sandra worked out of their home for years, caring for their children while trying to get their fledgling roofing business off the ground.

"I was broke for two years, almost three," McGlothlin said. "I remember doing a Safeway store here in Fort Worth as a first job and I actually made \$30,000 on that job after doing no jobs, so I said, 'You know, I think things are looking good.'"

Today, Empire Roofing lives up to its name as one of the largest commercial roofing companies in the country. The \$148 million dollar contractor runs a network of 14 locations, employs 700 workers nationwide, has been in the top 10 of RC's Top 100 Roofing Contractor list since 2016, and serves some of the nation's most successful Fortune 500 companies.

With a long list of accomplishments to its name already, RC is proud to add another jewel to Empire Roofing's crown: Commercial Roofing Contractor of the Year.

"I've been so fortunate over the years to be blessed by so many people," McGlothlin said upon receiving the award. "There's no way someone can do it by themselves, you know?"

Not Built in a Day

After business began picking up in 1985, Empire Roofing formed new crews and bought the phone number of a roofing/insulation company that was shutting down its roofing division. Sandra ran the administrative portions of the business and continues to do so today, and despite the two separating more than 10 years ago, McGlothlin said the business still runs smoothly.

"I've been asked over the years did I ever dream that we would be the size we are today? No, it was completely by accident," McGlothlin said. "It wasn't anything we ever anticipated or dreamed about from the start."

McGlothlin, who serves as president, said the business really took off by 1987 when it hired essential and talented employees, such as Matt Kelley, who leads the company's sales and marketing.

"One thing we understood was that I could put on a good enough product to give (Kelley) the confidence to be able to sell, so if you're a salesperson and you

believe in your product, how easy is that to sell?" said McGlothlin.

Around the same time, Empire Roofing became a certified roofing contractor with Owens Corning. McGlothlin said there were very few certified commercial contractors in the Dallas/Fort Worth area at the time, so his company quickly gained momentum. Empire Roofing expanded to Austin, Texas in the late '90s and Memphis, Tenn., soon after.

The expansions continued through partnering with industry professionals like Billy Evans, John Dollar, Steve Pearce and Ben Koonce to manage new markets. The company now has locations spread across six states and in Mexico.

"The biggest part of our success has been the partners too," McGlothlin said. "You surround yourself with a bunch of good people, everybody's got the same goals."

Empire Roofing prides itself on 100% of its work being reroofing, repairs and maintenance. While that may seem counterintuitive to generating new business, it works for the 10 largest property owners in the U.S. and has tackled high-profile projects. Clients like American Airlines, Philip Morris USA, Purina, and Kraft Foods turned to Empire Roofing.

Achieving nationwide success comes in part from the companies that inspired Empire Roofing's owners. McGlothlin said they aim for Empire Roofing to be the Maytag repairmen of the roofing industry by providing the best service, and for maintaining the cleanest trucks and equipment around, modeled after UPS.

McGlothlin admitted that, in addition to UPS, his upbringing played a role in his desire to keep Empire's operations clean and dressing its employees in crisp uniforms. He said his mother, being on welfare, constantly cleaned the few articles of clothing they had.

"She said, 'Nothing else matters other than I just want you to be clean all the time. People will look at you and think highly of you as long as you're clean,'" he said. "She even said to me, 'I never want to see your shoes dirty because I think that reflects on how clean a man is.' Those kinds of things, as I was growing up, always stuck with me."

Its success is also owed to working with all the major suppliers and manufacturers, including Carlisle Construction Materials.

"Empire has been an authorized Carlisle applicator since 2002, and is a two-time recipient of the company's prestigious ESP (Excellence in Single-Ply) Recognition, which is awarded only to roofing contractors that consistently exceed Carlisle

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standards,” said Nick Shears, president of Carlisle Construction Materials. “Carlisle is proud of its 18-year partnership with Empire and we look forward to continued mutual success.”

In the end, though, McGlothlin credits building one of the largest commercial roofing companies to its people.

“We have amazing supervisors along with great partners that also check quality control on a day-to-day basis, which ensures Empire can maintain the quality that the Empire clients want and deserve,” McGlothlin said.

Going the extra mile is woven into Empire Roofing’s fabric. One example is its E-Leak program, an innovative solution that allows tenants to go online and, with a few clicks, report a leak. Once the form is received, Empire Roofing promptly responds to schedule a repair.

Thanks to its commitments to high-quality work and service, Contractor of the Year is just one of the many accolades Empire Roofing has earned. Its extensive list of achievements includes Gold Circle Awards for innovation and service; the Fort Worth Chamber of Commerce Small Business of the Year Award; and multiple entries on the Inc. 5000 list from Inc. Magazine that signifies it as one of the fastest-growing companies in the country.


McGlothlin and Sandra have received individual recognition as well, such as Businessman and Businesswoman of the Year Awards from the Fort Worth Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, the James Q. McCawley Award from the Midwest Roofing Contractors Association (MRCA), and Industry Leader Awards from the North Texas Roofing Contractors Association (NTRCA).

Safety and Survivability

Like its roofing practices, Empire Roofing takes safety to the next level with a comprehensive safety program. To enforce its plan, Empire hired Naphis Mitchell-Reyes as a full-time employee in 2019. He previously worked for a safety company and managed Empire’s safety since 2008.

In its safety plan, the company prohibits employees to work in areas where they may be exposed to fall hazards unless wearing fall protection devices. Retraining is provided whenever there is a change in job assignments; a change in the type of fall protection equipment used; or when a known hazard is added to the work environment that affects its fall protection program.

The safety program hasn’t gone unnoticed — Empire Roofing earned a Gold Circle Award from the National Roofing Contractors Association (NRCA) for safety.



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The company’s national reach and safety program served it well once COVID-19 struck the U.S. in March 2020. Last May, Cal Schreiner, national accounts manager for Empire Roofing in Colorado, said the company’s size and revenue streams allowed it to weather the negative impacts of the pandemic.

“Fortunately, we’ve been staying real busy and our cash flow is good,” Schreiner said.

An Empire of Giving

Empire Roofing believes giving back is part of being a successful business. On the industry side, McGlothlin has served as president and first vice president of the MRCA, has been on the board for the National Roofing Contractors Association and a past president of the Roofing Contractors Association of Texas and NTRCA. Most recently, Cheryl Chapman, general manager for Empire Roofing, was elected to be a director on the NRCA for 2020-21.

“I think the camaraderie between contractors is helpful to see what’s working and what is not. The relationships are probably one of the most valuable assets, along with all the wonderful resources each organization has,” McGlothlin said.

The company also participates in several Habitat for Humanity projects, donated and replaced the roof of All Saints Catholic School, Fort Worth, and most recently took part in blood donation drives during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Empire Roofing received the MRCA IMPACT Award in 2011 for its commitment to improving communities through philanthropy or community service. It’s a testament to the overall impact this roofing company has had on the industry.

“People ask us, ‘Is there any secret to your success?’ No, there’s no secret,” McGlothlin said. “You just do what you’re telling people you’re going to do, if not more.”