

Contractor Profile:

by Josephine A. DeLorenzo

Collier Roofing Co. Inc.

Roofing may be mostly for the boys, but there are some women up to the challenge. The first question you want to ask them though, is, "How did a nice girl like you end up in roofing?"

When she was a young child, Yvonne Collier's father, Jerry Cannon, worked first for Tennessee Sheet Metal and then for R.D. Herbert & Sons Roofing. "He worked in the sheet metal department and I was always fascinated with his skill," says Collier. "Watching him take a sheet of copper and turn it into something so detailed and beautiful was truly amazing."

Collier began her career in commercial real estate and property management, and as she explains, "I naturally called upon R.D. Herbert & Sons for our roofing repairs and replacement needs. This led to meeting my husband, Jerry F. Collier, who worked for R.D. Herbert & Sons." Yvonne and Jerry started Collier Roofing Co. Inc. on a part-time basis in 1979 and it grew to a full-time business by 1990. "This is when we were finally confident enough

and financially prepared to leave our weekly paycheck jobs and go for it on our own!" says Collier. Today the company employs 50 people, and is on track to exceed this number with its current backlog for the summer.

Collier Roofing does commercial and industrial roofing including new, re-roofing and roofing repairs. The company is an authorized applicator with all the major manufacturers including Carlisle, Firestone, Fibertite, BondCote, Siplast, Johns Manville, TAMKO, Tremco, Performance, GAF and TopCoat. According to Collier, "Our specialty is the difficult roof, better known as the job no one else wants."

Projects

"I think all of our jobs have some little something of interest, even if it's only the spectacular view from the roof," says Collier when asked about interesting projects in which the company has been involved. "The more difficult the job, the more interesting

and challenging it is for us." She recently saw her first "official" IRMA roofing system (installed up-side down with the roofing system directly on the concrete deck, followed by the insulation, and ballast). "We are tearing off this type of roof at Vanderbilt University Medical Center and it is made even more interesting due to the multiple levels of the roofs. You have to go up, then down, then up, then down to get to the various roof areas we are working on."

Two other challenging jobs the company completed for Vanderbilt and the Veterans Hospital were almost identical. "We named them the 'Chiller Challenges.' And, it was one big challenge!" explains Collier. "Both were in high-maintenance traffic areas that had recently been subjected to a major retrofit of the chiller system. The existing chillers had recently been replaced and the existing roof severely damaged. Both sites were further complicated due to being located behind a 25-foot blind and five stories above a busy hospital. Throughout both projects, the chillers remained in full operation, and the discharge water had to be controlled and contained while the removal and installation of the new modified bitumen roofing was in process." Nonetheless, Collier Roofing successfully completed these projects with little or no impact on the hospital's operations.

Another project that stands out is the MeHarry Hospital. "We seem to have a knack for finding the tough hospital jobs!" says Yvonne. "At MeHarry, the roofing project was located between buildings in the middle of the hospital complex about 60 feet down. It was totally covered with green moss and looked like a pond in the middle of the summer. We found it hard to believe it was really a roof. But, down we went, removed the old roof, took the debris up and out, and down went the new modified bitumen roofing system. This was really an accomplishment and compliment to our men for installing a beautiful roof in such a tough spot!"

Holding Her Own


Collier Roofing is a woman-owned Disadvantaged Business Enterprise certified by the state of Tennessee. What does this mean exactly? The Federal Highway Administration developed a program, administered by the Tennessee Department of Transportation for all state departments, to encourage minority, female, and other disadvantaged firms to work in the highway/bridge industry. Both state and federal construction projects and monies are included in it. There are several eligibility criteria for certification, including: 1) owners must possess the expertise to control the daily operations and management of the firm; and 2) owners must be able to show ownership of at least 51 percent of the firm through real and substantial investments of capital. Once certified, a firm is placed on a statewide list of firms showing that it is certified and listing its work areas.

According to Collier, "It is quite a daunting process to get certified, but it does help on certain projects, especially government. You frequently still have to be the low bidder, but may get invited to bid on the project initially because you are a DBE firm." She reiterates that to get certification, you can't just be a woman owner. "You have to prove you know your business, how to do the work,

how to run a job, how to bid a job. The state makes sure you're just not someone's wife, etc., on the books trying to qualify."

As a woman in roofing, Collier has encountered many unique situations in what can be a difficult industry. "However, with patience and many years of hard-work, I have earned the respect of both clients and competitors," she says. "As more and more women enter the construction industry, acceptance is easier than it was even 10 years ago. You still occasionally have the circumstance where the contact or decision maker has difficulty dealing with a woman. In that case, I keep my thick skin on, step back and let Jerry take over."

This ability to compromise and focus on winning the business is one reason the company stays on top. Collier also attributes her success to: "Being blessed with my husband Jerry who is one of the hardest working people you could ever know. With his dedication and determination, we have together succeeded beyond our greatest expectations. As a team, we built Collier Roofing Co. Inc. with honesty, dependability and quality."

Collier's philosophy is to do it right from the beginning and if called back for a problem, promptly respond. "We stand behind our work and our name," she says. And perhaps most importantly, "We never forget all the years we were the 'employee.' We treat our people the way we would want to be treated. And, it must work because the majority of our team has been with us for years and years." 

Josephine A. DeLorenzo is editor of Roofing Contractor.

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