



07/06/2005

Growth streak prompts business to add facility

By Jed Young, Potpourri Publisher

Bob Hawthorne, of Hawthorne Steel Buildings, has serious plans for his Magnolia company. Not that he's done too badly in the last three years since starting his business in February 2002 - he's basically been on a hot streak of growth.

"We've pretty much doubled every year," he said.

And the company is on track to double again this year. As part of an expansion plan, Hawthorne is constructing a manufacturing facility on FM 1488 about 3 miles west of FM 1774 in Magnolia to keep up with the demand of this, his latest business venture.

Hawthorne, who lives in High Meadow Ranch with his wife and four children, first retired in November of 2001 after selling another business, Power Strategies.

He soon tired of the retirement lifestyle.

"It was just me and Oprah," he said.

He started looking for something else. The idea of steel buildings came to him when he was having one built and felt like he could design and build one better. He searched around this region of the country researching companies, and ended up buying a company in Oklahoma that was making steel buildings at the time. That company had about 10,000 buildings built and on the ground.

"They had a good design but we took it and beefed them up," he said. "People around here want beef to 'em."

He explained that the Hawthorne buildings are unique, because they are all 100 percent galvanized and 100 percent welded. In addition, he said, the metal is never in a bind, like some other buildings that are framed, loosely bolted and "stretched" to true-up the structure before the bolts are tightened down.

The Hawthorne buildings have metal posts/trusses every five feet. "When we put up the sheet metal, we actually attach the sheet metal to the trusses, instead of attaching sheet metal to sheet metal."

On top of that engineering ingenuity, Hawthorne explained, he uses what he calls a "single-source accountability" concept of constructing the steel buildings.

"We do the entire thing turnkey," he said.

In other cases for example, a homeowner, or potential building owner, may have one contractor pour a concrete slab, another work on the framing and another actually attach the sheet metal.

"One phone call - we're responsible," he said.

Hawthorne completes his construction in three to four days once the foundation is done, he said, with the average building size being a 30 foot by 50 foot structure.

In addition to the large buildings, Hawthorne has introduced the new "Bulldog" portable utility buildings which are perfect for suburban type back yard space, he said. These Bulldogs are smaller versions of the larger Hawthorne Steel products, also with 100 percent galvanized material and welded construction.

Hawthorne Steel Buildings is now operated out of leased property in Pinehurst.

The new manufacturing facility will include the ability to manufacture both the large buildings and the Bulldog products.

Once the Magnolia location is up and running, Hawthorne's expansion will also include a new sales office in Katy along with more crews to help keep up with the additional work as needed.

"My goal is to be the largest supplier of residential outbuildings in the Houston area," Hawthorne said.

He is targeting 2007 as the year when he says he'll start franchising the concept of Hawthorne Steel Buildings.

"Our franchising will be affordable," he said. "We won't be stifled by people who can't afford it. It will be finding people able to run it."

Hawthorne said he also wants to give back to the community.

So, among a number of things that he's doing, he has started a college scholarship fund that will be used to help local students go to college.

"The fund should be available by the end of 2006," he said.

Scholarships will be handed out to deserving Magnolia Independent School District students who are involved in the community and have good grades but can't exactly afford to go to college. "But I want to decide who will benefit from the college fund," Hawthorne said.

He said he has other businesses in the area that will be helping him with the college fund.

Hawthorne said he should be moving into his new facility by mid-September.