

Oliphant & Sons Paint makes safety part of the culture

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The fact that Lloyd G. Oliphant & Sons Paint Inc. in Oxford had the lowest average experience modifier (mod) this year of all the CompTrust AGC members would be newsworthy enough. But the company also had the lowest mod rate last year, an impressive achievement indeed.

However, after talking with second-generation owner Lloyd N. Oliphant, one quickly realizes that accomplish, while noteworthy, should not be surprising. A focus on safety is part of the firm's culture. All of Oliphant & Sons Paint's workers, from the laborers to managers, are expected to not only keep their own safety in mind, they are to look after their co-workers, too. In fact, they even watch out for workers who are not company employees.

"Our employee base has been with us a long time, and

they know how we work and how we're geared," Oliphant says. "They are taught to check on each other, both those in their crew and those in other crews. They even watch out for non-company crews on the worksite to make sure they're working safe. That's just how we operate."

Big footprint

The roots of the company go back more than 50 years when Lloyd N.'s father, Lloyd G. Oliphant, entered the painting business in Oxford. The initial projects were primarily painting local schools and small commercial buildings.

It has grown steadily ever since, and the company of today bears little resemblance to the original business. For more than 40 years, the firm has been an industrial and commercial painting company specializing in spray painting, specialty coatings, textured coatings, wall coverings and caulking. Instead of schools and small buildings, the firm now tackles stadiums and manufacturing facilities, correctional facilities, office buildings and retail establishments.

Oliphant & Sons Paint also provides year-round maintenance contacts to manufacturing facilities.

The firm has found customers far and wide. Its primary regions of operation are in the Southeast, Southwest and Mid-Atlantic states. In all, it has worked projects in 18 states as well as in Mexico.

If anything, its list of clients is as impressive as its geographic reach. A short list of clients includes Proctor & Gamble, Nissan, Caterpillar, Georgia-Pacific, Kraft Foods, Mississippi State University, University of Mississippi, Mississippi Valley State University, U.S. Navy, U.S. Army, U.S. Air Force, U.S. Marines and Frito-Lay.

The number of employees varies, sometimes running as high as 75 workers. Oliphant says the company usually has 60-plus employees on the payroll. He gives high praise to his staff, many of them having been with the firm for years.

"They are very efficient — it runs smoothly when I'm not here," he says. He adds, with a chuckle, "In fact, they say it runs better when I'm not here."

Forming relationships

When asked what he attributes Oliphant & Sons Paint's success to, Oliphant says the forging of long-term relationships with clients.

"We have a very good relationship with contractors and owners. They know us, are comfortable with us," he says. "We know what we do well, and we only go after those kind of jobs. So, when that type of work comes up, we are always on the short list."

Returning to the safety theme, Oliphant adds that the company is choosy about who it works for and with, and one thing it scrutinizes is other company's safety records. If they are not safe, Oliphant & Sons Paint passes.

Personal relationships are also important to Oliphant. He grew up in the family business, starting as a laborer and working through the ranks. At first, it looked like his career path would go a different direction. He briefly worked in banking, lived in California and was a lab technician at Georgia-Pacific before drifting back to the family business.

The "& Sons" part of the company name came when he and his brother, Danny, purchased the company from their father and an uncle. Unfortunately, the company's name is a misnomer now. His father passed away in 1998, and Danny was tragically lost in a non-work-related accident two years later. He has two daughters, neither of which seem destined to join the company, so Oliphant says he has no immediate plans for retirement.

He does remain committed to his community. Oliphant recently won the Democratic nomination for the Lafayette County Board of Supervisors, and is preparing for the November 6 general election.