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Stewart Richey Construction celebrates 50 years

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1 of 12



Members of the Stewart Richey Construction team, the Bowling Green Area visitors cut a ribbon Thursday to celebrate Stewart Richey's 50th anniversary at its new headquarters at 2137 Glen Lily Road.

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Buster Stewart and his pal Bill Richey didn't have many plans after they finished their time at Western Kentucky University in the early 1970s.

"We came out of college and we didn't know what we wanted to do," Stewart recalled.

That was until his father, the late Jimmie Stewart, asked the boys in 1973 if they wanted to open up a construction company together.

"It turned out OK," Buster Stewart told the Daily News on Thursday, the 50th anniversary of Stewart Richey Construction.

What began as a three-man contracting crew between Richey and the two Stewart men has since bloomed into a 300-person-strong service and construction company with divisions in everything from plumbing to HVAC repair to fire protection.

A few dozen of those workers, as well as representatives from local government and the Bowling Green Area Chamber of Commerce, were on hand to celebrate the milestone at the Stewart Richey headquarters on Glen Lily Road.

"We've had so many, and still have, good employees," Richey said, adding that the company's longevity is humbling. "It's not about us."

He said he and Buster Stewart had the “perfect” working dynamic, with the former able to spend his time working out of the office while the latter handled the bookkeeping and paperwork.

“Bill has tons of patience,” Buster Stewart said, adding that his partner always preferred residential projects while he stuck to commercial development.

“He can spend three hours with the wife of a client picking out a doorknob. I’m more like, ‘just pick something out, if you don’t like it, we can change it later. Let’s go.’ ”

The co-founders, getting up in age, chose to sell their enterprise to Houchens Industries in 2000.

“It was an opportunity, and who buys construction companies?” Buster Stewart said. “So that came along and it worked out good for everybody.”

That was also the year that current president Roddy Grimes joined the team.

“We’ve probably tripled in size, as far as revenue, in the last 24 years,” Grimes said. “We’ve experienced tremendous growth.”

Part of that growth comes thanks to the company’s diversity. Each one of its trade services is operated as its own business unit.

“It allows so many trade opportunities and opportunities for employment for the people in Bowling Green and Warren County,” Grimes said.

He explained that most of the company’s output is its trades division doing work for other contractors.

“One of the most notable projects in our area right now is O-I Glass,” he said, referencing the bottle company’s plant currently under construction in the Kentucky Transpark. “Scott, Murphy & Daniel is the general contractor on that job, but we’re fabricating and erecting all of the structural steel for that new facility.”

He said that this method of operation has left Stewart Richey’s fingerprints on “thousands and thousands of jobs in our community.”

Grimes said a local trade company reaching half a century of life is a reflection of the health of the industry and should be a reminder to younger members of the workforce that a job in plumbing or HVAC repair doesn’t have to be thought of as a second-class profession.

“And there’s great companies to work for in the trades business,” Grimes said.