



PEAK SUMMIT

Quality Equates to Success at Northern California's Summit Roofing Services

By Andrew Dietderich

In the mid-2000s, Tom Asbury had an epiphany: The key to success would never be in owning the biggest, flashiest roofing company in town.

The 65-year-old said, instead, he realized success would be found through delivering the highest possible level of quality at each and every job.

It's an approach that Asbury said works for his company, Summit Roofing Services of Manteca, Calif.

Proof?

Revenue is consistently in the range of \$5.5 million to \$6

million, and Summit Roofing Services has been profitable every year since Asbury bought it in 2001.

Employee retention is high. Customers come back. Debt is zero.

Those reasons are enough to think the 26-year-old company isn't going to slow down or change anytime soon, but there's one other big one.

"I just enjoy being part of the roofing industry," said Asbury, the outgoing president of the Western States Roofing Contractors Association (WSRCA). "I like the people and it's treated me really well."



› Summit Roofing Services has 30 employees (24 roofers, one superintendent, one service manager, and four office staff). Owner Tom Asbury (far right) said the majority of employees have been with the company 15 years or more.

business — I just wanted something on my own,” he said.

He learned Summit Roofing Services was up for sale.

“Chris finally said ‘Just go do it. I’m tired of you talking about it, just go try it,’” Asbury said. “It was just good timing.”

Asbury bought Summing Roofing Services with a business partner in 2001.

For Asbury, the move into ownership was the culmination of nearly 30 years in roofing. He started in 1973 when his brother urged him to get a roofing job with Fidelity Roof Co. in the Bay Area.

Asbury said he was hooked on roofing from the beginning, when he realized he liked working outside, liked being part of a trade industry, and he liked the people.

“There’s a comradery, right? That we’re all in it together,” Asbury said, noting that he still has a handful of close friends that he met years ago through roofing.

“We all share in the same accomplishments, the same failures, have the same gripes, have the same praise,” he said. “It’s just a good nucleus of people.”

Going It Alone

When he and his partner bought Summit in 2001, Asbury admits to being “pretty scared” — despite having learned a tremendous amount during his time with Bryant Universal.

At the time, Summit had relatively solid business practices and generated annual revenue of between \$2 million and \$2.5 million.

Asbury said he had an on-the-job crash course in business operations.

“I still had to learn the insurance side of it, the banking side of it, and how all that works together,” he said.

Asbury said his partner, who had owned other types of business, helped him learn.

In 2004, Asbury bought the partner out and became sole owner of Summit Roofing Services.

‘Just Go Do It’

Summit Roofing Services was founded in 1993 by two former employees at Bryant Universal Roofing Inc., a Phoenix-based contractor that was forced to shut down and layoff its entire workforce of 1,300 across three states in the mid-1990s.

Asbury was among those affected by the shutdown. Though faced with a challenge, his entrepreneurial spirit remained intact.

“I kept telling my wife, Chris, that I wanted to venture out on my own, see if I could either purchase a business or start a

Summit Roofing Services

Location:

Manteca, Calif.

Founded:

1993

Current Principal Owner:

Tom Asbury

Scope of Work:

100 percent private commercial roofing with nearly all being reroofs.

Company Specialty:

Projects range from almond storage buildings for Blue Diamond Growers to Class A office buildings and hospitals. Most of Summit’s work is done within 100 miles of its Manteca office, which is about 60 miles east of Oakland.

Number of Employees:

30 non-union

Website:

summitroofingservices.com

Did You Know?:

Asbury said he only wants to do between \$5.5 million and \$6 million a year, noting that the range allows for everyone associated with the company to be successful without insurmountable amounts of pressure.

“I had my feet wet by the time I bought him out,” Asbury said.

Asbury said he continued learning, in particular with the help of his banker as well as Jim Ornellas, the owner of Ford Wholesale Co. (a distributor in the area), where Summit Roofing was able to obtain its first line of credit.

“I sat down with him once a month and we’d go over my financials and he would help me understand them — where you should be and what percentages should be,” he said.

Asbury said there are two specific things he learned during that period that stick with him today.

“No. 1, if you make a promise, you keep a promise,” Asbury said. “If you tell a customer, or you tell a supplier, or you tell a banker that you’re going to do something, by God you’ve got to come through.

“And if you can’t come through you’ve got to come forward and try to work

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“A lot of my guys have worked in production shops where it’s ‘You’re not getting 100 squares done in a day, why not? Since you didn’t get the 100 today, you have to get to 125 tomorrow.’ I’m not in that business. I’m not looking to do \$100 million worth of roofing.”



Asbury said Summit Roofing Services uses a small group of manufacturers (Sarnafil, FiberTite, Siplast, Johns Manville, Tremco and National Coatings) to maintain direct and close contact with representatives of those companies.

through it,” he said.

The other big lesson he learned at that time?

Cash is king.

“You’ve got to have cash through the lean times,” he said.

As a result, he’s adamant about paying all bills on time and not carrying any debt.

Among the ways Asbury said he works toward avoiding debt and other financial problems is keeping costs in check.

For example, the company buys good used vehicles instead of regularly adding new ones to its fleet.

“I see other companies with these fancy trucks that they lease and they’re brand new every three years...everything’s real fancy, right?” he said. “I have a nice clean fleet. I buy used. It’s nice and clean. I don’t have cranes. I don’t have fancy trucks. I drive a plain Tahoe. My superintendents drive plain trucks with ladders on them. I just keep it real simple.

“I don’t need all the bells and whistles. I don’t want to go through another 2009 when — knock on wood — I made money that year but just barely. I didn’t have any debt and that’s what helped me get through that period.”

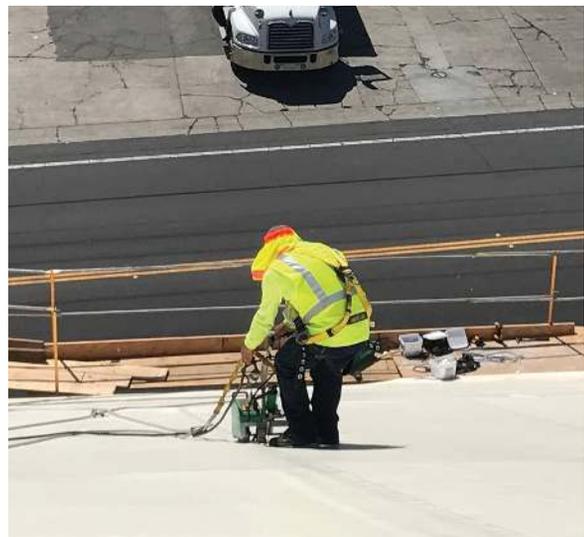
Reaching the Summit

Today, Summit Roofing Services has 30 employees (24 roofers, one superintendent, one service manager, and four office staff).

Summit Roofing Services has administration, sales/estimating, production and service departments.

The company does 100 percent private commercial roofing with nearly all jobs being reroofs.

“I’ve got myself in a position where I can stay out of public works now,” he said. “And I have a handful of customers that result in repeat business from year-to-year.”



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Projects range from almond storage buildings for Blue Diamond Growers to Class A office buildings and hospitals. Most of Summit's work is done within 100 miles of its Manteca office, which is about 60 miles east of Oakland.

Asbury said most of the customers are repeat and that he believes it's a reflection of the quality work Summit does. He attributes that to ongoing training and job site management.

Another factor, he said, is how he manages the company's workload.

"I just instill in them 'Look if it's going to take an extra three days to make this job look right, and be right, then that's what you guys have to do.'" Asbury said.

Another factor that plays into sustained levels of quality is the low level of employee turnover. Asbury said the majority of employees have been with the company 15 years or more.

Asbury said Summit offers "very good wages" to both our hourly and salary employees, medical, vision, dental

For ongoing training, Summit uses the IRCC's continuing training program for journeyman and the NRCA's programs where they study and attend classes for project and customer management, leadership and refresher courses in roofing practices.

Looking Ahead

Asbury spent that last year as WSRCA president and worked toward several goals, including getting more women involved with the roofing industry, and fostering the growth of more workforce training.

Asbury said he feels as if he has had success in working toward those goals.

For the next year, he will serve as immediate past president of WSRCA and says he will miss being on the board when his time's up.

Beyond that, he may seek to get involved in some of the training programs being led by NRCA.

"That's what our industry needs," he said. "I think I'll try to get involved somewhere there, and also with women in roofing. Wherever I can help really."

When it comes to the future of Summit Roofing Services, Asbury said "the plan" is that his son, Sean, 30, will one day take over.

Sean currently works as project coordinator for the company.

"He works directly with my two superintendents with purchasing and he helps manage the office now," Asbury said, adding Sean is a member of the Young Roofing Professionals with WSRCA and is applying to be part of the NRCA Future Executives Institute.

And while Sean is the only family member directly involved with Summit Roofing, Asbury said the company's success — and his own success as a businessman — never would have been possible without support from his wife, son, and two daughters, Erica, 43, and Sharie, 41.

"You need that support base and you have to thank them every day," he said. "If you don't have a good family base I don't think you can be a successful entrepreneur." **RC**

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➤ **Above:** (Left to right) WSRCA Executive Director Tom Pappas, Steve Nash, vice president of Waterproofing Associates, Don Fry, founder and president of Fry Roofing Inc., and Asbury. **Left:** Fry (right) most recently served as WSRCA's immediate-past president. Asbury now steps into the role.

coverage, 401K program, paid vacation and paid major holidays.

Additionally, he stresses the importance of "an open door policy" and being available to any employee.

"They know how much I appreciate them because of my roofing experience having been in their position," Asbury said.

Summit Roofing Services also invests in training for employees.

"I have sent my superintendents to a number of leadership programs to enhance their management skills," Asbury said.

The company uses the IRCC (Independent Roofing Contractors of California), a state-approved apprentice training program that all of Summit's new employees join. They attend a three-year classroom and hands-on training program for the roofing industry.

"A lot of my guys have worked in production shops where it's 'You're not getting 100 squares done in a day, why not? Since you didn't get the 100 today, you have to get to 125 tomorrow,'" Asbury said. "I'm not in that business. I'm not looking to do \$100 million worth of roofing."

Asbury said he only wants to do between \$5.5 million and \$6 million a year, noting that the range allows for everyone associated with the company to be successful without insurmountable amounts of pressure.

"I have it structured so I'm not taking on so much work that I have to push my