

ALAN HOWELL | MBJ



BY JANE ALDINGER

Henry Haizlip has built a business on relationships.

From dinners to fishing excursions, Haizlip loves relationship work and has grown his construction business, Grinder Haizlip Construction Co., Inc., around that philosophy.

"We work with friends, and we want to be your ally," he says. "That's where I do best."

An outdoorsman at heart, Haizlip got into construction because it was a business where he could work outside. As a principal, most of his work now is in the office, but he still loves to get out of the chair and visit job sites.

"If that ever goes away, my name will be missing from the construction scene."

Greg Grinder sold his equipment company and "retired" in 1992, but had dinner with Haizlip one evening and decided that retirement wasn't ready for him yet. He came into business with Haizlip, and "we've never looked back."

Grinder runs the industrial side of the business and Haizlip handles commercial construction, speculative warehouse development and private commercial ventures.

Dan Wilkinson, Colliers Wilkinson & Snowden chairman, is Haizlip's friend and business partner. The two have worked as developer/contractor partners for 20 years, initially forming a partnership to develop industrial buildings on Prescott, near Lamar and I-240. The group built seven buildings and was able to lease and eventually sell all of them.

"Like every partnership that ever exists, if they make money and the partners all make money out of it, it turns out to be wonderful," Wilkinson says.

The best thing about Haizlip is his "street smarts," Wilkinson says, and the fact that he is a "straight shooter" and pleasant businessman. "That makes him very easy to work with."

Haizlip grew up in Memphis and attended the University of Tennessee, but says he "never latched on to liberal arts," and left college to pursue a career in construction.

His father was a loan officer and would line up summer jobs for his son to work his construction accounts. He

immediately took to the physical side of construction and enjoyed working as a laborer in the industry.

He set his sights on an office job and opened his own construction company, with best friend and home builder Hank Hill, that was backed by two men who "figured out we were hard workers."

Haizlip easily tired of the repetitive side of home building because he wasn't doing custom work and wanted to get into the commercial construction realm. In 1974, he opened his own commercial firm.

"I didn't know that I didn't have a chance," he says with a smile.

But that "no chance" business has evolved into a \$20 million construction company in Grinder Haizlip.

At first, Haizlip was able to get by

subcontracting for local construction leaders like Vince Lucchesi, R.E. Linkous and M.C. White. Haizlip Construction Co.'s gross volume in 1974 was about \$6,000.

"They just took mercy on me," he says. "Plus, they got some good cheap work."

Haizlip began taking classes at Memphis State University, studying surveying, estimating, construction law and business. While he never received a college degree, he says he amassed enough hours to earn a Ph.D.

He attributes his success to simple principles of hard work and dedication. What sounds cliché has worked well for Haizlip's business, based on advice he took from his father, who told him, "successful guys are the

ones that don't get confused."

"I have done nothing but stay in the business and work hard," he says. "Some of the guys that helped me in the beginning lived to see me become competition."

Haizlip has an enduring sense of problem solving, and he attributes some of that to his family. His grandmother remodeled 20 houses in her lifetime, and his brother, Reb Haizlip, is principal of his own architecture firm, Haizlip Studio.

Some projects Henry Haizlip is proud of include the Bartlett Community Center, the FedEx Flight Operations Center and a Downtown renovation project at Pontotoc and Front.

"It's fun to figure out how to build something," he says. "I love seeing that piece of dirt and creating a building."

Henry H. Haizlip
Principal: Grinder Haizlip Construction Co., Inc.
Hometown: Memphis
Age: 57
Family: Wife, Sarah
Hobbies: Hunting, fishing, snow skiing, mountain biking, backpacking

Building relationships

Contractor lays business foundation by courting strategic alliances

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