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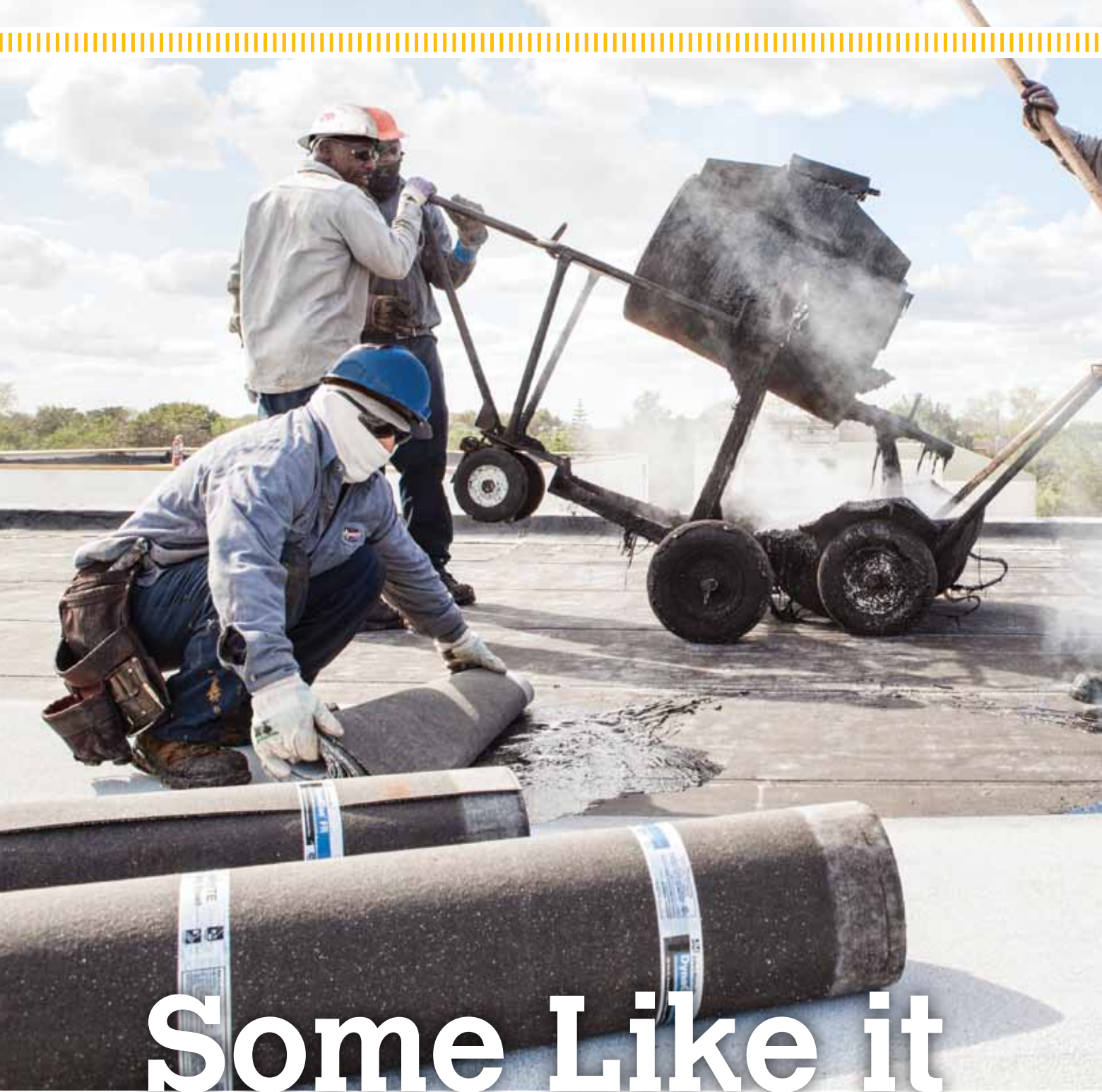
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## BUILT-UP ROOFS ARE A BIG PIECE OF THE PIE AT ADVANCED AND EMPIRE

by Chris King

Statistics show that the built-up roofs are a shrinking sector of the market nationally, but for many contractors, their built-up business is booming. Two large commercial contractors who saw a big boost in revenue from built-up applications in the past year are Advanced Roofing Inc., headquartered in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., and Empire Roofing, headquartered in the Dallas-Fort Worth area. The owners of these two hot companies in hot climates believe built-up roofs might be the longest

lasting, most dependable roofs out there. Even as they kept a wary eye on asphalt fumes and the safety concerns that come with hot kettles, the folks at Empire and Advanced believe that BUR has a place in the future and for many buildings, BUR can be the right application for the job.

### Advancing BUR in Florida

Rob Kornahrens, CEO and president of Advanced Roofing, estimates that between 50 and 60 percent of his company's revenue is generated from

> Advanced Roofing generates more than half of its revenue from built-up projects. Photo: Redinger-Libolt.

built-up roofs. "Our volume of BUR fluctuates," he said. "However, this year we have seen an increase in demand of BUR systems from our customers. Since the beginning of the year, we have experienced a greater demand for coal tar and asphalt roof systems."

The commercial roofing company has approximately 300 employees and brought in \$41.5 million last year, a figure Kornahrens probably never dreamed of when he launched his own company in 1983. "A neighbor in Long Island owned a large roofing company, and I began working for them at the age of 14 and throughout college," he said. "I opened a branch for them in Atlanta immediately after college and started Advanced Roofing Inc. three years later."

He said his biggest challenge when starting the business was "convincing my dad to loan me \$15,000 to start the company."

Kornahrens credits his entire team for the company's continued success. "What makes Advanced Roofing Inc. stand out from the rest is our ability to successfully navigate through logistics and time frames required to achieve quality work on complicated projects," he said. "Key challenges often include completing buildings that are occupied and working around clients' business hours. We are able to coordinate crews during off hours, evenings, and weekends to meet the customer's needs for a variety of individual situations."

In many cases, the roof of choice is a built-up roof. "With a wide variety of roofing systems that are currently available, BUR has consistently been a popular choice among our customers and is one of the most common roof systems we install in South Florida," he said.

"We recognize its benefits to the building owner as one of the highest-quality roofs that we can install."

Of course, the application is not right for every job, including highly sensitive buildings such as schools or hospitals, but there are some options that can be explored for built-up roofs beyond gravel surfacing. "Due to the fact that South Florida is located in a high-velocity hurricane zone, more energy-efficient reflective cap sheets are being installed as a top surface rather than flood coat with rock," he said.



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Kornahrens notes that built-up is a time-tested system, but he has seen material upgrades and specification enhancements over the years. One change he's seen is an increase in job-specific engineering to meet high wind-uplift pressures. "Another recent change in application for us has been switching from cotton to fiberglass mops in applying asphalt and coal tar," he said.

Construction Manager David Baytosh outlined some of the reasons why the company made the switch to fiberglass. "Advanced Roofing is always looking for continuous improvements," he said. "We had seen several advantages to switch to fiberglass mops. Safety was a big reason for the switch; unlike cotton mops, the fiberglass is noncombustible and will not catch fire. We find the fiberglass mops are more economical because we are able to re-use the mops from day to day. We are able to obtain better pricing when purchasing the fiberglass mops. The mops provide a more consistent delivery during the application process, as the asphalt and coal tar flows at a better pace."

Baytosh cited proper training and

safety precautions as the keys to any roof installation, including BUR. "Hands-on training in the field and doing mock-up demonstrations with a variety of vendors at the company's warehouse are part of the continuous training efforts and improvements we provide our field and office personnel," he said. "Different vendors, such as Naomi Dupre from Kirby Fiberglass, perform training sessions on their products such as the fiberglass mops. Lunch and learns are common, and the staff is provided opportunities to become better educated on the latest improvements in the roofing industry. Our company's foremen are actively participating in the NRCA Pro-Foreman Course at our company's facility."

Safety training is comprehensive, and all field personnel have taken or are working on an OSHA 10-hour training course, while construction managers and foremen have earned their OSHA-30 hour training course certificates. "Safety is our number one priority," Baytosh said.

Kornahrens is proud of his company's expertise in built-up, but he also strives

› Checking out a built-up job in progress are Cheryl McGlothlin and Ronnie McGlothlin of Empire Roofing. Photo by Bruce E. Maxwell.

to keep his company on the cutting edge. He believes that no matter what the application, his company can get the job done. "Advanced Roofing is constantly striving for excellence with continuous training and improvement within the industry," Kornahrens said. "We hold the highest regard for safety and the well-being of each employee. Our pride is demonstrated through community involvement and charitable contribution. We are a one-stop shop company with a state-of-the-art facility providing quality services in all aspects of a roofing project, sheet metal, air conditioning, waterproofing and solar."

### **Building an Empire in Texas**

Ronnie McGlothlin left his job at another roofing company to start his own business when he was 21 years old. He and his wife, Sandra, founded the company together, hatching the business plan over their kitchen table. Empire Roofing now has 475 employees with Texas locations including Dallas-Fort Worth, Austin, San Antonio, Houston, and El Paso, as well as Atlanta, Memphis, Tenn., Orlando and Pompano Beach, Fla. "I took eight people with me when I started the company, and I still have six of the eight working for me 31 years later," he said.

McGlothlin's goal was to build a solid reputation from the start. "One of the things that we always wanted to do was to differentiate ourselves from other contractors," he said. "We mimicked the Maytag Repairman and the UPS guy who had the cleanest ship in the industry. We figured that if we could be clean and do good work, this would be an advantage for my sales guys."

According to McGlothlin, the biggest challenge over the years was managing the growth and making sure all of the locations were operating the same way. He pointed to his company's employees and their excellent workmanship as the keys to success. "Sandra and I have managed to hire the right people for the job," he said. "What we lacked in knowledge, we hired. And, of course, our workmanship today is still far superior to 95 percent of the contractors out there."

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The amount of BUR Empire does varies quite a bit, but in the past two years it has surged to account for more than 60 percent of Empire's business. "In the Dallas-Fort Worth area, people still like a good built-up roof," McGlothlin said.

He chalks up some of the enthusiasm for built-up to some recent storms, including a 2012 hailstorm that resulted in emergency repair work on some single-ply roofs and skylights, but the modifieds and built-up roofs held up; while some sustained damage, they did not leak. "In our area, that's what people look at," he said. "We have so many storms and so much hail around here that for a lot of owners who can't afford to have water in their building, they are going with built-up roofs. They are more durable."

Gravel roofs are popular in Dallas and Fort Worth, but many systems Empire installs include white, highly reflective cap sheets. "We do a lot of hybrid-type systems," he said. "In some municipalities, like Austin and Houston, that's all we can put on."

McGlothlin believes built-up roofs aren't much different than they were 30 or 40 years ago. Empire also made the switch to fiberglass mops — in part because of safety concerns, including the greater risk of fire with cotton mops. "Plus, fiberglass has gotten a little more affordable for us," he said. "A crew could easily go through four to six cotton mops a day, but we're using two mops a day with fiberglass. Even if we dispose of them at the end of the day, they are still affordable."

McGlothlin is keeping a close eye on EPA classifications with asphalt fumes, and he has hired a full-time independent safety consultant to ensure proper safety precautions are followed. He acknowledges that asphalt fumes can be a concern, but he believes the key is to use built-up for the right applications with the right owners and the right occupants. "We have been very successful with built-up tar and gravel roofing systems," he said. "They have been proven to last."

Empire has flourished in a tough economy. McGlothlin noted his business has grown at a 30 percent clip for three years in a row. "We've gone from a \$38 million company to a \$93 million company this last year," he said. "When people ask us why, the only thing I can credit is that I think a lot of owners aren't looking for the

## Can You Actually Re-Use a Mop?

**N**aomi Dupre is president of Kirby Fiberglass, a manufacturer of fiberglass mops and fiberglass brushes for the roofing industry, and the most common question she receives is "Can you really clean and re-use a mop?" She often visits jobsites to provide demonstrations for the crews. "I want contractors to achieve a significant cost savings," she said. "The best way for me to do that is to make sure they understand how to scrape out the excess asphalt and reheat the mop. An added bonus is what I learn from each crew I work with. Every roof is different. Consequently, the more demonstrations I conduct, the more I learn."



› Naomi Dupre of Kirby Fiberglass demonstrates how to scrape excess asphalt out of a mop. Photo: Redinger-Libolt.

Dupre is a big believer in the benefits of fiberglass mops. "In a nutshell they provide opportunity for increased production and cost savings," she said. "Safety is another large benefit. They don't burn and catch fire like a cotton mop will. They also aid in the consistency of asphalt applied to the roof. There are fewer voids and more asphalt delivered because the mop does not absorb the asphalt like cotton. A cotton mop will get more difficult to work with at the end of the day because it absorbs more asphalt. In addition, the felt plies are fiberglass just like our mops are fiberglass. This allows for less friction; the mop will glide on the roof, making it easier to work with. The mops are made from recycled fibers and can be used multiple days, so there will be a cost savings."

Dupre outlined the procedure for cleaning a fiberglass mop: "You just lay it down, step on the handle to keep it steady, and take a shovel to scrape asphalt out of the center of the mop. Flip it over and do it again to get the asphalt pushed out of the mop. I learned a trick from the crew at Advanced. When you do this at the lunch hour or end of the day, try to do it at the base of the roll to finish out the roll. It's a very efficient use of the asphalt! After you will spin the mop out, it can be hung. To thaw it out, you will put it back in mop cart and add the hot. It should just take three to five minutes to soften back up. Plus, the performance will be the same as the prior day."

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lowest price anymore. They are looking for someone who's going to be there for them, somebody that's got a good reputation, somebody who can give them something they don't have to worry about for years to come. And I think in 31 years we've been able to prove we can do that."

McGlothlin credits everyone at his company for building that reputation, including his daughter Cheryl and son Mark, who represent the second generation

of the family to work in the business. "It's a team effort," he said. "Everybody has to believe in what we're doing here. No matter how good one person is, he can't do it by himself. I'm fortunate to have been surrounded by so many wonderful people who believe in what Empire's trying to do." **RC**

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