

# ROOFERS IN THE NEWS

ROOFING STORIES AND EVENTS THAT ARE MAKING HEADLINES

## *Roofing Contractor's* 2012 Commercial of the Year:

## **John A. Dalsin & Son, Inc. A Century of Excellence**

*By Chris King, Roofing Contractor magazine*

**T**here's a famous statistic that shows fewer than 3 percent of private businesses will make it to the third generation. That means a family business going strong as the fifth generation enters it has really defied the odds.

John A. Dalsin & Son has been a family owned and family run roof-contracting firm for more than 100 years. The company has done more than simply survive during that time; it has earned the trust of its customers and the respect of the entire roofing industry. The company's longstanding reputation for quality workmanship and professional integrity has also resulted in it being named *Roofing Contractor's* 2012 Commercial Roofing Contractor of the Year.

Bob Dalsin, the president of John A. Dalsin & Son, says the success of the company boils down to one thing: its people. "Without them, the company wouldn't be anywhere," he said. "The good work they do gets us more work, and they are very knowledgeable, very capable, very committed. We're just committed to making sure the job is going to work and it's done right."

Headquartered in Minneapolis, Minn., the [Local 96] union shop has about 100 employees. The primary focus is on commercial roofing and sheet metal work—the majority of it roof replacement—along with a little high-end residential work.

The company is a member and strong supporter of the National Roofing Contractors Association (NRCA), the Midwest Roofing Contractors Association (MRCA) and Twin Cities Roofing Contractors Association, and Bob Dalsin is a past president of all three organizations. In 1993

he received the MRCA's James Q. McCawley award, the organization's highest honor, for outstanding contributions to the roofing industry.

The company's commitment to quality is essential in a market like the Twin Cities, according to Bob Dalsin. "We're probably the coldest major city in the United States, so the roofs we put on have to be able to withstand the winter, and the work has to be done during the non-winter season because you can't do much in the winter if there is snow and ice up on the roof. So it's a very limited season, and very challenging to find roofs that can stand up to the ice and snow and cold of winter, as well as the heat that can come in the summer. We have probably more variance from the low temperatures to the high temperatures than any part of the country. So our roofs have to be designed better and put on better than in other parts of the country."

### **Company History**

The company's roots have always been in South Minneapolis. It all started in 1912, when John A. Dalsin, Bob's grandfather, decided to buy the small hardware store in which he worked. The owner had passed away, and John Dalsin purchased the business, as well as the small roofing and sheet metal business which operated out of the back of the store. "That was the beginning of John A. Dalsin & Son," said Bob Dalsin. "It's been a family business all the way along. My grandfather gradually expanded the roofing and sheet metal business out of the back of the hardware store, until it got so big that they had to move to a larger location about a half a block up the street."



Business was booming, and John asked his eldest son, Russ, to come on board instead of going off to college. Looking back, Bob Dalsin believes that decision was perhaps the key to the success of the business. “One of the big steps was when my dad graduated from high school and he went to work in the business. I think he would have liked to go to college, but my grandfather needed him, so he went into the business full time, and so did his three younger brothers.”

Eventually the three brothers left, with two of them starting their own business. But the company kept growing. In 1936, John Dalsin retired after he developed Parkinson’s disease. Russ continued to grow the business, and in 1948 the company leased some railroad properties and erected a warehouse and shop. In 1954, the company sold off the hardware store to concentrate solely on roofing.

In 1964, Bob Dalsin graduated from St. Thomas University and officially came on board full time. He’d been working there most of his life. “I had worked summers as a clerk in the hardware store starting at age 11,” he recalled. “I did that for a few years. Then at 15 I started in the office, doing accounting and job costing. I worked one summer up on the roof as a roofer. I worked a summer doing sheet metal, another summer doing warehousing and truck driving, so I did a lot of different things.”

Bob Dalsin hadn’t planned to enter the family business, but he decided to make roofing his career. “I had planned on becoming a teacher,” he said. “But since I was the third of three boys, and the other two had opted not to get involved, I decided, well, if I were a father and had sons, I’d sure want them to be involved. So I thought I would give it a try, because I’d always liked what I was doing when I worked there.”

It was a family business, but that didn’t mean there wasn’t some friction along the way. “The truth is my father and I didn’t agree on much when I started,” Bob said. “However, my dad was smart enough to put me under one of the top salesmen and just kind of leave me alone. So I worked with Wally Sherard, who trained me, and my dad had a lot of respect for him, and as a result of that it went along very well. As I got more experience and more knowledge, my dad was eventually willing to let go and let me run it.”

Bob Dalsin took over managing the company in the late 1970s and became president in 1981. “In 1975 we built a whole complex here with an office, sheet metal shop and

warehouse,” he said. “That was a big milestone. I’d say the two biggest milestones were when my dad entered the business, and moving to this location and building a new complex of buildings.”

When Bob’s sons Mike Dalsin and Jim Dalsin joined the company, they represented the fourth generation of the family to join the business. “My sons are both here and have been for quite a while,” said Bob Dalsin. “They are both in sales and estimating. And then my oldest son has two boys, one who’s a junior in college and the other a senior in high school. So they were here for the summer.”

With family members in the business, Bob Dalsin has tried to use the same approach his father used with him. “My dad and I didn’t always see eye-to-eye, but he had some very capable people here, and he let me learn so I was able to do that in a free and open atmosphere. That worked out very well,” he said. “And my sons and I, I leave them alone and let them to do what they’re doing and they are both very good at it. And I handle the management part. Different departments do their own thing, and I tend to be a hands-off manager. I want to have really good people that can do their job and do it well without me nitpicking everything they do, and I think that’s one of the things that has made us successful.”

## High-Profile Projects

The company has been involved in a lot of prominent projects over the years, including Gavildae Common, St. Leo the Great Catholic Church in Minot, N.D., The Cathedral of St. Paul, St. Thomas Aquinas Chapel at the University of St. Thomas, the Ford Twin Cities Assembly Plant and the Mall of America.



*Barbara and Bob Dalsin, seated center, and employees of John A. Dalsin & Son, Inc. celebrate being named Commercial Roofing Contractor of the Year by Roofing Contractor magazine. Photo by ©Bergerson Photography.*



The Mall of America is memorable both for its notoriety and the sheer size of the project, noted Bob Dalsin. It also had a very tight schedule. “It was really a fast-track project. We would put the roof on before they had the walls done on the outside yet, and we’d have to come back and tie it in again. And they’d be spraying the fireproofing material on the underside of the steel deck after we put the roof on — they’d be under there doing that the next day.”

The two primary roof systems installed on the \$625 million, 4.2 million-square-foot complex were a fully adhered 90-mil EPDM system and a four-ply built-up roof topped by a white, granulated-surfaced cap sheet. Everything came in on time and under budget.

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Other projects that stand out include the IDS Tower, the tallest building in downtown Minneapolis when it was constructed in 1972. The company installed a hot-applied built-up roof atop the 57 story building, which was accessible only by a hoist which came up through the center of the building and a tower crane. “It took a lot of planning and scheduling to work it out, but we did it very successfully,” Bob Dalsin said.

## **Excellent Employees, Satisfied Customers**

When asked what makes his company so successful, Bob Dalsin points to his company’s dedicated employees. “First of all, our people are very well trained,” he said. “They go through a union apprenticeship program, which helps a lot; they teach them the basics—even though we’ve had them on the roof for a couple of months before they start the program. And we have very skilled, experienced foremen and lead men that teach the new guys how to do it and how to do it right. So I think training and the commitment to doing it right are key.”

If something does go wrong, the company reacts quickly. “We were one of the first in this area to have a dedicated

service and repair department,” Bob Dalsin said. “There’s nothing worse for an owner than to have a leak in their building and interrupt their activities. If they do get a leak, they want it fixed right away. First of all, they’d rather not have one, so that’s our first goal, when we do their roof. But if they do have one, we have dedicated repair crews that are well trained and experienced, and they go out and fix it.”

“The other thing is we communicate well,” he continued. “On every job we communicate very well with our customers. We let them know every day what our plans are, what we’re going to be doing, and if there are any issues, they can get a hold of us to take care of it. So communication is a big part, but it’s also building trust over the years. A lot of our customers are repeat customers; they come back because we’ve done a good job for them.”

Bob Dalsin likens his entire company to a large family, and he is committed to keeping workers safe on the job. “The way we make sure our people stay safe and follow our program—and we have a very comprehensive written program—is we inspect it,” he said. “Not only do our superintendents inspect the job almost every day, but we have an outside service through our association that inspects all of our ongoing jobs. They give us a report and we track it. We track our foremen, and if they have any violations they get warnings. We have progressive discipline that goes with repeated safety violations, and as a result we hardly ever have any. They know we’re committed to safety. Sometimes they say, ‘I’ve got to get more done in a day,’ and we’ll say, ‘Yes, you do, but you’ve got to do it safely.’”

He’s proud of his company’s achievements, but he reiterated that success in the roofing industry comes from a rather simple formula. “You need really good people—really good people who are committed to doing the job right, to doing it productively and doing it safely,” he said. “We aren’t in business just to make money. If that was all we were about, we could cut corners and do a lot of things that would be more profitable. But it’s nice to sleep at night and not have to worry about anything you did or said to somebody. It’s a good way to do business, I think.”

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## A Biker's Blessing Rally-goer donates time to help elderly

By Heather Murschel, Reprinted with permission. Black Hills Pioneer © 2012

SPEARFISH, S. Dak.—Seniors are receiving a helping hand this week, as a Minnesota man has dedicated his vacation to sprucing up a local home and volunteering his time at the Spearfish Senior Center.

“If you have the ability to do something you have an obligation to do something because there’s no sense in just sitting around,” said [Roofers Local 96 member] Ray Waldron, 66, of Minneapolis, Minn. “These are my friends, and I’m going to help them out.”

Waldron met Joyce and Jack Loree three years ago at the Burger King in Spearfish.

“I just went up to him and asked him if he’d like to join us for lunch,” Joyce said. “We found out he was staying in Belle Fourche, and we offered him our home because we had the extra space and he seemed like a good guy and so down to earth.”

This is the third year he’s stayed with the senior couple. Each year he visits, Joyce said he brings a dozen roses.



Retired member of Local 96, Minneapolis, MN, Ray Waldron (pictured left) takes a break from scraping, sanding and washing off a deck in Spearfish. He is pictured with Joyce and Jack Loree, a senior couple he has been helping out during his trip to the Sturgis Motorcycle Rally. Pioneer photo by Heather Murschel

Since he arrived Thursday, Waldron has scraped, sanded and washed the windows, only to prime and paint them the next day. He’s also organized the shed and garage, trimmed the hedge and Monday he was hard at work sanding down the deck to prepare it for a new coat of paint.

“He’s supposed to be on his vacation and instead he’s working ... he is certainly one heck of a guy,” Joyce, 79, who has Parkinson’s disease and has trouble doing home repair tasks, said. Jack, 78, she said, has trouble lifting anything more than 10 pounds so it’s difficult to get things done around the house.

In addition to helping Joyce and Jack, Monday morning Waldron went to the Spearfish Senior Center to assist them with distributing breakfast to bikers, one of their most successful fundraisers of the year.

So why does he do it?

“The senior center really needed the help,” he said. “They serve thousands of meals during this time and they don’t have enough volunteers.” He will be helping Wednesday and Thursday as well, and leave town on Friday.

As for the Lorees, Waldron joked that he’s gotten a few free meals out of the deal so it’s all in the name of friendship.

“They’ve been nothing but nice to me, so I’m going to do what I can to help,” he said. “Plus these are things that need to be done and you can’t ride every minute of the everyday.”

Waldron said he’s been attending the Sturgis Motorcycle Rally for several years.

“I’m into motorcycles and this is the mecca for motorcycles,” he said. “And it’s the best riding around.”

He is retired, but he said he’s quite the handy man.

“I’m a roofer by trade and we can do anything,” he said with a smile. ■



## Commercial Roofers, Inc. Celebrates 15-Year Anniversary

Commercial Roofers, Inc., in Las Vegas, NV, celebrated its 15-year anniversary with an open house on October 11, 2012. The guest list included local general contractors, property management companies, manufacturer reps and facility directors and engineers from casinos, along with friends and family. The festivities featured raffle prizes, catered appetizers and cocktails for the 200+ attendees.

In 1996 Scott Howard and Dennis Conway purchased the company with 20 employees and renamed it Commercial Roofers, Inc., returning the business to local ownership. In 2007 Commercial Roofers, Inc. moved into a new, more spacious and modern office building on Naples Drive. Today Commercial Roofers, Inc. is one of the largest roofing companies in the U.S. with over 150 employees. The company is signatory to Local 162, Las Vegas, NV.

“Never ceases to amaze me,” said Scott Howard, principal.

“I started this company with a sales figure of \$10 million. Now it has grown so much with the quality people we have—from the apprentice roofer to our admin staff—and that is what makes us a success. Great personnel is the backbone of our organization.” ■



*Owners and employees of Commercial Roofers, Inc. celebrate 15 years of success in the roofing industry.*

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## Nashville Roofing Installs Sustainable Copper Dome for Belmont University

Nashville Roofing and Sheet Metal, a division of RSS Roofing Services and Solutions, has constructed and installed a weatherproof copper dome for Belmont University's College of Law at the new Randall and Sadie Baskin Center. The 71,000 square foot educational center is slated to open this fall.

“Clear communication and precise attention to detail were vital throughout the project due to the unique structure of the dome and the safety of my crew,” said Carlton McGrew, general manager of RSS Division in Nashville. “Given the dome had a double radius going in two different directions, with batten seams separating the segments, we had to execute the project in eight unique segments using a process of pattern planning.”

The project involved two years of planning and collaboration to match the design of the other buildings on campus and its natural landscape. Guided by principles of their corporate safety program, called the Legacy Safety League, the team of expert installers and management discussed the challenges of the installation and took preventative safety measures to ensure that every crew member was safe throughout the project.

Beyond natural beautification, a copper roof was chosen based on its resistance to the elements and its ability to perform well beyond 100 years. Unlike other metal roofing materials, copper requires no painting or finishing and it's an easy material to form over irregular roof structures. When properly designed and installed, a copper roof provides an economical, long-term roofing solution with low life cycle costs attributable to the low maintenance, long life and salvage value of copper. ■



*Signatory contractor Nashville Roofing & Sheet Metal installed a weatherproof copper dome for Belmont University's College of Law in Nashville, TN.*