

Buhrts Builders celebrating 75th anniversary

By Lauren Zeugner
Staff Writer

Buhrts Builders Inc. has been part of the Syracuse community for 75 years and the Buhrts family will celebrate with a ribbon-cutting Friday, July 15, and a special boat cruise on the Lilly Pad for employees, subcontractors and their families Saturday, July 16.

Customers who live around the lake Buhrts Builders have worked for over the years have been asked if they would post a sign in their lakeside yard on Saturday for the cruise.

Ray Buhrts started the business after World War II. At the time, Ray owned a lumberyard with a partner, then started doing construction and remodeling projects out of his house.

In 1958 Ray purchased two lots on Huntington Street for \$3,000 and then spent \$21,000 constructing a building and pole barn for his business. He even built his house on Waco Drive.

When Ray did a project, he was known to be on the job site right from the beginning. "He would do a lot of work himself, and when needed, he would subcontract trades," explained Matt. "He was a perfectionist and wanted to do the work himself."

Ray passed the business on to his son, Mike, although he didn't completely retire. He would come back on occasion to assist with jobs or do some intricate woodworking when needed for a job. Ray passed away in 2009.

"Ray was a perfectionist and she (Leona, his wife) was customer service," Matt's wife, Jennifer, explained.

Mike and Sandee ran the business successfully, producing a high quality end product that Ray was known for, until they decided to retire in 2009. They asked their nephew, Matt, and his wife, Jennifer, if they'd like to purchase the business.

Matt worked for his dad, Dennis, at Buhrts Engineering for 18 years in metal fabrication, estimating and job coordination and saw this as a good opportunity to buy into a successful business.

"One of the things that appealed to us was that the end of a job didn't mean the end of a relationship with the customer," Matt said in a 2009 interview. "We appreciate that this business has been built on repeat customers and referrals. It's a testament to the quality of work Mike put in, and my grandpa before him."

"We just like helping customers," Matt said. "A lot of people around the lake are expanding their home for their kids and grandkids. We enjoy doing the work and having our new homes or renovations last for generations."

They've also had some customers they worked for, for the first time, be visibly shocked when they see the result of Buhrts's work. "It's a wonderful thing," Jennifer said, explaining the relationship starts there.

Buhrts Builders has grown to a staff of six full-time carpenters, four full-time office staff, one part-time estimator and one part-time property manager.

Throughout its history, Buhrts Builders has focused on working in residential rather than commercial building in Kosciusko County. The business has not only done projects around the lakes, but also in Warsaw, Winona Lake and as far south as Crystal Lake.

Buhrts Builders is a general contracting company that prides itself on doing all of the woodworking and custom carpentry themselves.

As Buhrt Builders celebrates being in business for three quarters of a century, Matt and Jennifer are looking to the future. Their son, Bailey, has been working with his parents full time for the last three years, although before that he was helping out while still in school.

Bailey said he prefers to swing a hammer rather than be in the office. Framing is his favorite part of the job. "At the end of the day, you see the progress," he said

Photo cutlines

DEDICATED STAFF — Shown is the dedicated staff who have helped make Buhrt Builders a success for 75 years. In the front are, from left, Sue Buhrt; Kara Niccum, office assistant; and Jennifer Buhrt, co-owner.

In the back are Travis Murrell, Jeff Simmons, Dave Tarlton, Kenton Haman, project manager, Bailey Buhrt, Drew Miller, Rod Hostetler, estimator and Matt Buhrt, co-owner. Photo by Lauren Zeugner.

NEXT GENERATION — Bailey Buhrt prepares to leave to go to a project site Buhrt Builders is working on. Right now, Buhrt is working as a contractor, but he is expected to be the next generation in the family to run Buhrt Builders when the time comes. Photo by Lauren Zeugner