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Van Derhoof Roofing keeps it in the family for 70 years

by *Maria Carbonaro*

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Van Derhoof Roofing employees work on replacing a local roof. The company offers roofing, siding, trim, and gutter services.

SYRACUSE — What does an accomplished violinist who plays with an orchestra do when he decides on a permanent vocation? He goes to work for a roofing company, and likes it so much that he starts his own roofing business. His grandson and namesake, William C. Van Derhoof (known as “Chip”), vice president of Van Derhoof Roofing Co., Inc. says, “He was really a phenomenal violinist.” He also was a good roofer since the company that bears his name celebrated its 70th anniversary in 2009.

The elder William C. Van Derhoof founded Van Derhoof Roofing Co., Inc. in 1939, at the age of 25, with his brother Fred.

William C. served in World War II, and Fred ran the business alone until William returned in 1945 to rejoin him. Fred remained in the business until his death in 1962, and William passed away in 1999.

Originally, Van Derhoof Roofing catered to the commercial trade and did insulation and roofing and store windows, but eventually, Chip explains, it just turned into a roofing business.

Chip Van Derhoof adds that “as the years went by, and my father became more involved, we began getting more into the residential side of the business.”

The second generation of Van Derhoofs — Chip’s father, William D. — started with the company 35 years ago. He graduated from Clarkson University with a degree in accounting, and went to work in New York City for the Arthur White & Company accounting firm. He made the decision to return to the area, however, and joined the family roofing business in 1975.

William D. is still active in the business, but not as much as he was previous to his son taking the reins.

“My father still works, although he has cut his hours virtually in half and goes away for the winter. Russ Cullen, who has been with my father for 25 years, runs much of the day-to-day operations with me,” says Chip, who co-owns the business with his father.

“I started working here after I graduated from college in 2002, full time. I started roofing when I was 18 years old; that’s when you can do roofing. When I graduated from college I was 23 and that’s when I went full time,” explains Chip.

Over the last five years, Van Derhoof Roofing has generated a 10 percent growth rate each year. It produced more than \$3 million in revenue this past year.

Being a seasonal business, it employs approximately 45 people from mid- to late-March to mid-December. Although the company doesn’t do installation in the winter, it still does repairs and caters to customers that need their roofs shoveled and other maintenance work.

“We have 15 employees that have been with this company for between 15 and 25 years. A lot of our foremen have been with my dad for 15-25 years. We get the same guys back every year because of the way we treat them,” says Chip Van Derhoof.

Van Derhoof says that from September 2008 through September 2009, the company saw its customers become more cautious in their spending.

“We were able to control our costs and deal with a modest slowdown in sales,” he explains.

“Since September 2009, our sales have picked up and are regaining prior levels. We are looking forward to continued growth in 2010.”

“It has gotten more difficult, but we’ve always been able to keep all our guys busy,” he continues, and the company has not instituted any layoffs.

In addition to repairing, replacing, and maintaining roofs, Van Derhoof Roofing provides siding.

“A lot of siding and seamless gutters, all kinds of siding, and we also do commercial roofing too, EPDM rubber roofing, torch-applied roofing,” says Van Derhoof.

Van Derhoof Roofing now primarily serves residential customers. Van Derhoof says the clients are split about 90 percent residential and 10 percent commercial. The company enjoys dealing with the homeowners one-on-one and establishing relationships with its clients that transcend the roofing and siding business.

“People trust us so much that even when they have questions about other things that we don’t do, they call us asking who they should call for this or who they should call for that. They call us for everything — painting, any kind professional services,” says Van Derhoof.

Van Derhoof Roofing operates from a 6,000-square-foot headquarters on Ainsley Drive in Syracuse. It began at 101 Belle Ave. in Syracuse and moved to its current location in 1953.

Its customers include the Rothchild family, McClurg Remodeling, Anderson-Barney Development Group, and several churches. Recent church projects have included Robinson Memorial Church in Westvale, St. Mary’s of the Lake in Skaneateles, and St. Charles Church on Fay Road in Westvale.

Van Derhoof says his firm stands out in a tough industry. “You know, roofing has a really bad reputation. There are a lot of fly-by-nighters in our business ... but when you offer a warrantee to someone or you guarantee your work, it’s nice to say, ‘We’ve been around for 70 years and we guarantee our work.’ Everyone is going to guarantee their work, but whether they can get someone to answer the phone when they call them when something goes wrong is a different story.”

Van Derhoof sums up his attitude about the company with a phrase he once read, "We're not the best because we're the oldest; we're the oldest because we're the best."

BOTW PROFILE

William C. (Chip)
Van Derhoof
VP/Co-owner

- Age: 30
- Education: Bachelor's degree, St. Bonaventure University
- Residence: Westvale
- Family: Wife, Carolyn
- Year became VP: 2005
- Favorite part of the job: The variety of work and many hats you have to wear that comes with owning your own business.

COMPANY FACTS

Van Derhoof
Roofing Co., Inc.
145 Ainsley Drive
Syracuse, N.Y. 13210
Phone: (315) 475-9541
Fax: (315) 471-2079
Web site:
www.vanderhoofroofing.com

- Type of business: Residential and commercial roofing contractor
- Products or services offered: Roofing, siding, trim, and gutters
- Region covered: Onondaga, Cayuga, Madison, Cortland, Oneida, and Oswego counties
- Founders: Brothers, William C. Van Derhoof and Fred Van Derhoof
- Year founded: 1939
- Employees: 45 (March – December)
- Headquarters square footage: 6,000
- Co-owners: William D. Van Derhoof, president; William C. (Chip) Van Derhoof, VP
- Annual revenue: More than \$3 million