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Tom Kirk
President & CEO
Kirk Acoustics

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"My father made his living as a bricklayer," says Tom Kirk, President and CEO of Kirk Acoustics, Inc. The bricklayer's son grew up on the west side of St. Paul, MN. By the time he graduated from Humboldt High School (a tiny one block square school a hundred years old) he had decided to become a union carpenter. When he finished the program at St. Paul Technical College at the top of his class, Tom took a job hanging ceilings.

As an apprentice, he had not considered a livelihood in acoustical tile. Once in the field, however, he discovered that it was ".....a nice specialty." Besides not being as tough as bricklaying, the job of hanging ceilings was unaffected by the elements, which meant he had no reason to miss work.

For ten years, Tom hung acoustical tile for a number of firms in

town, primarily Dale Tile and Architectural Sales. In 1983, he started Kirk Acoustics with an office at home in the house he built on a wooded hill in Inver Grove Heights, MN, one of the highest points in Dakota County. "I never felt the need to go out to an office," he says. "Our materials

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are purchased from a distributor on a per job basis and I have two warehouses for our equipment."

Bev Kirk, who is wife, mother, office manager, bookkeeper and payroll specialist, raised their three children while she and Tom built their business. "Bev, my wife for 30 years, has been an integral

part of this company," says Tom. "Many times I considered hanging it up, but she was there supporting me and working hard right along side me to keep the business growing."

Daughter, Megan, age 21, recently graduated from the University of St. Thomas. Son, Zach, age 17, is a junior in high school at St. Thomas Academy. "Although neither of them may end up working for our company full-time," says Tom, "they both had a hand in watching it grow. Megan is developing our company website and this year, for the first time, Zach spent the summer doing odd jobs for the company."

A year ago, Tom invited his older son, Randy, age 28, to become the company estimator and project manager. A union carpenter himself, Randy, like his father, worked in the field ten years before he came into the office. "The job of estimating became totally, *continued on page 3.....*

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overwhelming on top of all the other responsibilities of running a growing company," says Tom. "It must be done correctly to keep everything moving smoothly. I decided it was time to bring in my son.

Kirk Acoustics does about 1,100 - 1,200 jobs a year of commercial work, everything from hospitals to shopping centers and office buildings. Starting out with only one field employee, today Kirk Acoustics employs 35 carpenters, some who have been with the company almost from the beginning. (Tom currently has two apprentices, one of which is an airline mechanic who saw the writing on the wall at Northwest Airlines and "...elected to try something else while he watched his friends go on strike," says Tom.)

In addition to hanging acoustical tile, the

company hangs Rulon™ ceilings and installs FRP (Fiberglass Reinforced Plastic) board on the kitchen walls of restaurants. "We also do a lot of wood ceilings," says Tom. "Most of our carpenters, who have either built their house or totally remodeled it more than once, look forward to working on the wood ceilings because it gives them a chance to use more of their many skills."

CCA

Although uncertain just exactly how many years he has been a member of CCA, Tom says, "I believe Bill Grimm called me one day out of the blue and asked me to join." Tom appreciates the opportunity to get to know the other contractors through the CCA. "We contractors get along because we need to lend and borrow each other's carpenters as the workload fluctuates. It's a

two-way street," he says.

FIRST OF ALL, BE SAFE

"I have enjoyed working the past 20 years," says Tom, "and I have a great group of people. Everybody is pretty well in tune with what is expected on the job regarding conduct and making the job move along as smoothly as possible."

"I tell them, 'First of all, be safe. If you see anything that could cause an injury, do not proceed until the situation is rectified, whether the problem is ours, or a condition on the job.' We will pull our people off a job before anyone can get hurt. The number of worker safety complaints we have is basically none."

Article by Anne Jeffries, Wordsmith & Co.
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