

The Columbus Dispatch

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 25, 2002

Strong foundation takes roofing company to its peak

By Amy Weirick
for the Columbus Dispatch

Whether adding a multi-million dollar roof to a commercial building, or handling a roof restoration on a small historical home, The Durable Slate Company takes the same approach on every project. Guided by a refreshing corporate philosophy, Durable Slate has been restoring, repairing and installing slate roofs for more than 16 years. Today, company president Mike Chan is focused on promoting that same philosophy to employees, customers and vendors.

"Business integrity is really a way of life for us," said Chan. "We get up in the morning to do exemplary work and to be of service to our customers and fellow workers. We know that in order to do well at what we do, it must be about more than just making money."

Prior to joining the company, Chan had never worked in construction - or any trade business. A 23-year old whiz-kid stockbroker, Chan was becoming disillusioned with office politics. He longed to experience a greater connection to his work and to see more tangible, solid results from his labor. Like the roofing his company installs, Chan found that nothing could be more solid and tangible than slate.

Chan researched The Durable Slate Company and quickly

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traded in his \$1,000 suits for a pair of beat-up jeans and a minimum-wage position as the company founder's assistant.

Six years later, Chan, his brother, John, and partner Ed DeLong bought the company. They reinforced an approach that focuses on ensuring that everyone in the business continuum prospers: customers, vendors and suppliers, employees and ownership.

That philosophy has helped Durable Slate to prosper and grow. And growth has created a demand for employees who share Chan's approach to doing things "The Durable Way."

"We don't always find that workers have experienced such a strong focus on quality and integrity, so we create that. We train them and build the environment of purpose," Chan said. "We operate this business so that everyone who is involved in our business wins. We don't try to get the most out of every employee, a customer or a supplier, but we make it a win-win for everyone involved. We automatically reap the benefits."

But doing good work just within your business circle is not

enough. Chan is committed to giving back. Durable Slate's community involvement has included everything from helping rehabilitate criminals by educating them about opportunities in the skilled trades to supporting literacy programs and truly grass roots efforts, such as sending teams out to clean the streets of Italian Village.

The company is also focused on the environment, working whenever possible to recycle slate and building products, keeping them out of landfills by returning them to serviceable building construction.

The nature of Durable Slate's product and work demands a

high level of craftsmanship. A file fat with letters from satisfied customers attests to the fact that the company frequently goes beyond what is standard in the roofing trade - even for higher-end slate roofing and historic property restoration. They thank the employees of Durable Slate for doing their job with expert craftsmanship. But they also highlight employees who have gone beyond the call of duty, how managers

pitched in to complete even menial tasks, how clean workers leave the job site and how they will gladly use the company again and refer Durable Slate to their friends and associates.

Those letters and the lasting beauty of the work the company does for its customers have given Mike Chan exactly what he was searching for 16 years ago: work he can see and appreciate and work that makes him proud.



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