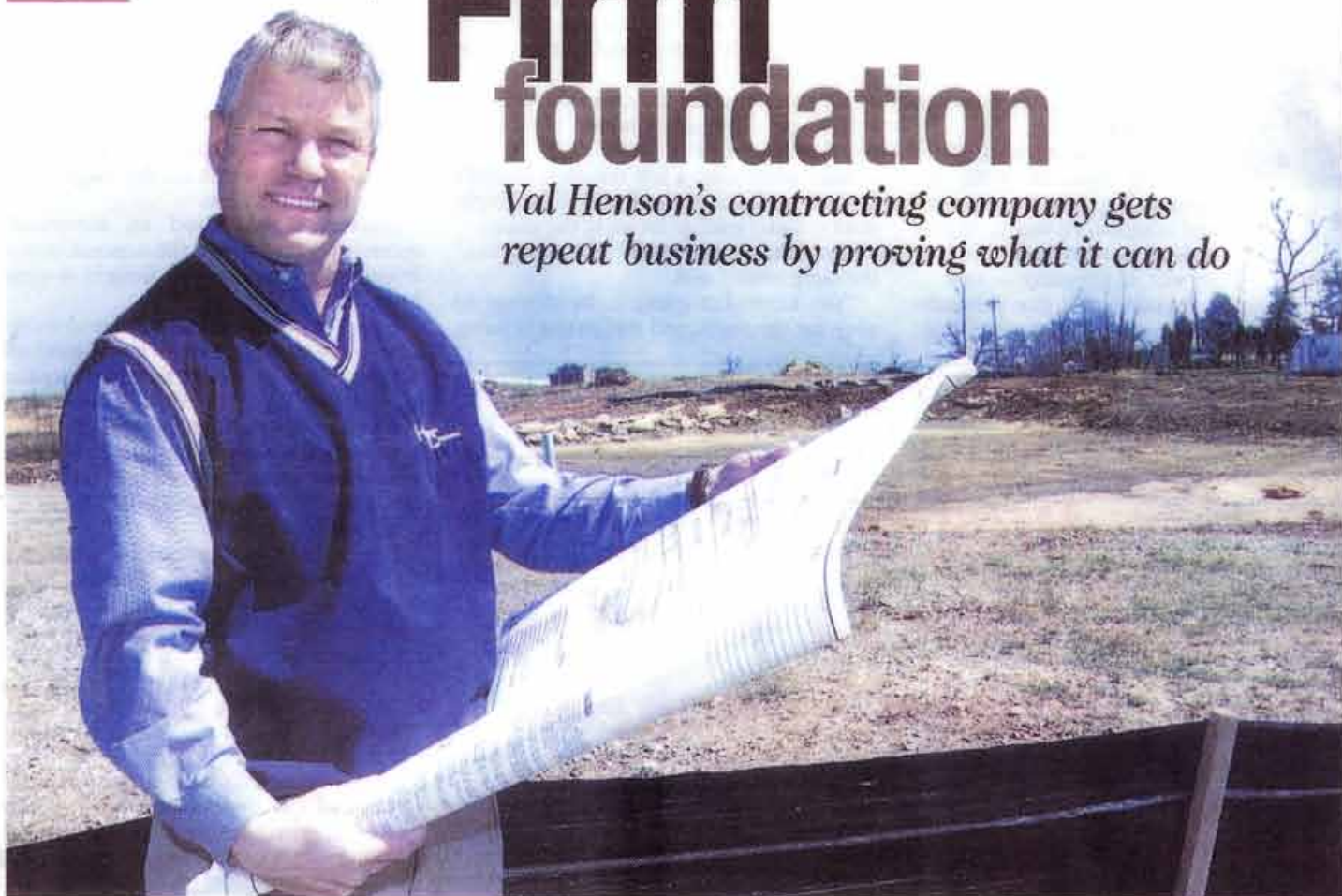


**Small Business
Snapshot****Firm
foundation***Val Henson's contracting company gets repeat business by proving what it can do*

RON BATH • BUSINESS FIRST

BY AMANDA WEBB
BUSINESS FIRST STAFF WRITER

Val Henson just wants to do the right thing. That's the foundation of his business, and he been successful because of it.

Henson, who started Henson Construction LLC in 2002 after leaving a position as vice president of operations at St. Clair Construction, believes in building a business on relationships. Mutual respect, integrity and hard work nurture those relationships, and, in turn, develop loyalty to his company.

"Please the customer and do what's right, always," Henson said. "I know that sounds corny in today's world, but that is what we are all about. We treat everyone fairly and give them a fair price, and that is how we get lots of repeat customers."

IN SMALL BUSINESS SNAPSHOT, Business First questions a small-business owner or manager to gain insight into the business. To suggest a company for a Snapshot, contact managing editor Carolyn Greer at cgreer@bizjournals.com.

"You don't always have to charge an exorbitant amount to be profitable. You can squeeze a nickel and get a lot out of it."

A project with one Famous Dave's BBQ restaurant franchise led to six other projects with the same owner. "You get in the door and prove what you can do," Henson said.

Henson Construction primarily builds and remodels restaurants, including some for Outback Steakhouse, Sonic and Bonefish Grill.

The company employs 10 people and hires subcontractors to handle about 90 percent of its projects. In its first year of operation, it had about \$3 million in sales. Two years later, at the end of 2005, the company had more than tripled its annual revenue to \$9.5 million. Henson said he expects to do \$10 million to \$11 million this year.

He recently answered the following questions about his business.

Why did you decide to be an entrepreneur?

"I have three daughters that are all diabetics. With my position at St. Clair, I was constantly on the road. My wife bore the burden of caring for the girls. A vice

president position is nice and all, but the family means the most. We mortgaged the house and took a loan from a family member, and decided to give it a try.

"I had been in the business for 20 years and had gone through every phase of the construction process. At every level I had success, and I felt like I could do this on my own."

What was most surprising about going out on your own?

"The cost of things you don't anticipate. Workers' compensation insurance for the first two years was just a killer. The same thing goes for all of the government restrictions, licenses and permits and various things you have to do. It's not as easy as having people send me drawings and just going to work."

What is unique about building restaurants?

"Restaurants are very challenging in that not only do you have the building itself, but you have a ton of plumbing, electrical, heating and cooling for the kitchen. It is challenging to coordinate all of that in a relatively small space."

Henson said that restaurant owners also have challenging schedules because they must base opening and training dates on the availability of workers and vendors. "We often complete a building in 90 days. We want to be done when our clients get there and get out of their way. You can't teach new employees about your business and concept with saws going in the background."

How do you keep your employees motivated?

"We have profit-sharing plans for employees. They are not just working for a company. They are working for **their** company. That means a lot to them because they know we are not just sticking it all in our pockets. And they have generated work for us by acting as salespeople. They aren't just drawing a paycheck. They are looking to learn and be entrepreneurs themselves."

Contact the writer via e-mail at ALWEBB@BIZJOURNALS.COM.

**Henson
Construction
LLC**

President and owner: Val Henson (pictured above)

Business: General contracting

Address: 11501 Plantside Drive, Suite 9

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Web site: www.hensonconstruct.com

Geographic reach:

Alabama, Florida, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Michigan, Missouri, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia and Wisconsin

Number of projects completed: 161