

CROWTHER

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along with Southwest Florida's population. The company's workers lay all types of roof, mostly for commercial projects. Metal, carpentry related to roofing, metal roof decks, architectural sheet metal, lightweight insulating concrete, light gauge steel roof trusses, and even air conditioning maintenance all fall under the company's areas of expertise. They are one of the top ten contractors in the country and do work all over Florida, Crowther said.

He zipped around the company's grounds in Fort Myers via golf cart, pointing out the gas station, a fleet of mechanics, the truss plants (which opens at 4 a.m., he said), 20 buildings, all together. His success was due to hard work, he said, a little luck, and maybe a few hurricanes.

In the early 1990s after Hurricane Andrew, Crowther picked up some extra commercial and residential work repairing the storm's damage. He expanded into Sarasota, Naples and Port Charlotte. But it was Hurricane Charley in 2004 that drove business through the roof, so to speak.

"We had about 225 employees and over a period of six months we acquired a total of 600," Crowther said.

They also jumped to one of the top five most profitable roofing companies in the nation (from 35th place). Since that time, some of those new workers have been laid off but the numbers still remain around 450. That's allowed Crowther to take on some monster projects, like the pyramid tops of High Point Place Towers in downtown Fort Myers. (For highrises, concrete and asphalt is pumped up to the roof through a hose and a crane hoists other materials up.)

"We did the whole package," he said. "I dare say you're not going to find another roofing company like this in the country — maybe in the world," he said. "I don't know this for sure but we've been told that by people who come here."

Crowther also built every roof on the 5,000 acres that is Ave Maria township in eastern Collier County.

"When we were doing that project it was the largest single construction project going in the U.S. at the time," he said. Crowther's part was estimated at \$2.4 million.

"They wanted to hire two roofing companies," he said. "I told them, if they were gonna do that, to count me out."

Crowther said he told them that for two reasons — because his firm is a competitor, and because he believes that one roofing contractor on a project would improve the end result.

"It was a fun job," he said. "Fun going out and taking a look at what you took 50 years building."

Crowther doesn't mean it took that long to roof every building in Ave Maria, but that

he's been at the business that long — and this project required finding every nook and cranny of his expertise, and maybe some of his forbearers. Crowther's father and grandfather came from Scotland to work for the roofing company Johns Manville.

"That's like saying 'Chrysler' or 'Ford,'" he said.



COURTESY PHOTO

Crowther's sheet metal department.

Between them, there is over a century of experience.

"And here I am in the twilight," Crowther said.

Now he's staying competitive by focusing on the basics of good business.

"That's what makes a good company," he said. "The quality of the employees and the service to customers. And we've really, really, really got some good employees."

He's also staying competitive with programs like "Roof Check," to maintain his customer's roofs.

"All my competitors have been trying to copy it, which is really a compliment to what we've been doing," he said. "We try to keep the guys roof lasting twice as long — and that's gaining their confidence."

He has no plans to make any changes to the company and said it's likely his three sons will continue the business as he ran it when he retires. They work with him now — Lee, David and Donald Crowther. He also has a daughter not in the business.

"Life has a beginning and an end and my career is pretty close to the end," he said.

And he can't imagine that career anywhere else but Florida.

"When I came down here I was about 35 years old," he said. "The major part of my career was spent here. I don't know if I have anybody that works here who would want to go back (to Chicago). It's just too rewarding to live here."

He plans on enjoying retirement with his wife and family.

"I live over on the river," he said. "And I have a boat in the back yard. Mom and I like the boat..."

"So we boat and we fly around the state a little bit with that corporate pilot and corporate plane. It gives us a little extra freedom." ■

HALL OF FAME

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USA Today, and served as president of the national publication. Flynn returned to Fort Myers in 1995 to retire, but he continued to work in the community for many years. Most recently, he served 10 years as president and CEO of the Southwest Florida Community Foundation.

Flynn is the honored recipient of numerous awards for his professional achievements and community service. A former Boy Scout, he has been a lifelong supporter of the organization, and he has been a leader in more than 13 other community service organizations during his lifetime. Among them are United Way of Lee County, Edison Community College Foundation, Fort Myers Chamber of Commerce, Senior Friendship Centers (Fort Myers), Rotary Club of Fort Myers, Florida Council of Community Foundations, and the Planned Giving Council of Lee County. Most notably, he was a member of the task force that brought the first four-year college campus

to Fort Myers, acted as a trustee of his alma mater Stonehill College (Easton, Mass.), and served on the board of the International Newspaper Promotion Association.

Junior Achievement's 2008 Business Leadership Hall of Fame, Lee County event will take place April 9 at the Hyatt Regency Coconut Pointe. Festivities will begin with a cocktail reception at 5 p.m. and dinner at 6:30 p.m. Tickets and sponsorship opportunities for the event are now available by calling the Junior Achievement office at (239) 225-2590. Event proceeds benefit Junior Achievement programs.

This year, Junior Achievement of Southwest Florida will serve approximately 7,500 students in Lee, Collier and Charlotte counties with the help of more than 300 volunteers. Junior Achievement's in-school and after-school programs are designed to educate students in grades K-12 on global economics through age-appropriate curricula focused on business, citizenship, economics, entrepreneurship, ethics/ character, financial literacy and career development. For more information or to volunteer, visit www.JASWFL.org or call the Junior Achievement of Southwest Florida office at 239-225-2590. ■

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