

BUSINESS

Passing the hammer

Transition taking place at Mathes Construction

BY MARK SHERRY

The footings were set years ago for the transition which is now taking place at Mathes Construction in Kiel.

Owner Tim Mathes, 58, will be fully retiring from the business at the end of this year, but the Mathes name will live on for years to come as his son Cory is assuming full ownership. Cory, 31, became part owner in 2016 and began working in the business in 2005 at the age of 15.

Cory said he is not planning any significant changes at the business as the focus will be on continuing the reputation for quality which his father started building 28 years ago. "We stand behind our products," Cory said. "We stand behind our work."

Tim did not start his work career with a plan to be in construction. He first worked at a canning factory and later at Bremer Mfg. in St. Anna. He then moved into the construction field, working for Kraus Construction of Kiel and later Lee Realty as a home builder.

In 1993, Tim decided to start his own business. He was living on 10th Street in Kiel at the time and used his single-car garage as home base for the new business. He purchased a gutter machine as no other business within 35 miles of Kiel was specializing in gutters, and Mathes Seamless Gutters was born.

While the business worked to corner the local market on gutter work, they also soon realized that gutter work is largely dependent on the weather and not real conducive to being done during winter. That led the business to expand into doing remodeling work, and later they added new home construction to their repertoire. About eight or nine years ago the business changes its name to Mathes Construction to better represent the

scope of work it was doing.

Tim had a couple part-time employees working with him when he first started. Today the business—which has an office at 901 Service Rd. in Kiel—has three full-time employees in the field and a full-time office person in addition to Cory now overseeing the operation. "I'm here for whatever the team needs," Cory said. "If I'm needed out in the field, I'm there."

In addition to having a "no job is too small" philosophy, Mathes Construction also aims to build between one and three new homes per year. Tim and Cory said they pride themselves on building good quality homes without being extravagant.

As Tim reflects on his career in the construction business, he said the biggest change in the business came around 2013 when Mathes Construction started building kitchen cabinets and bath vanities. Changes in products over the years—and currently the availability of those products with supply chain challenges—are also among the biggest changes he has seen.

Cory has experienced those changes as well in his 16 years with the business. He started working for the company by cleaning windows and cleaning the company vans, but said he did so willingly. "He's never forced me into it," Cory said of his father. He said he had enjoyed building things at home with his dad, and by age 16 knew that carpentry and construction were what he wanted to do as a career. Cory was an apprentice journeyman from 2008 to 2013 through a Lakeshore Technical College program, one of five carpenters Mathes Construction educated through that program. "I enjoy working with my hands, seeing the customer be happy," he said.

Cory said he plans to continue to



Father-son Tim and Cory Mathes are transitioning at Mathes Construction in Kiel as Tim retires and Cory assumes full ownership of the business. MARK SHERRY PHOTO

service their customer base—basically within a 45-minute radius of Kiel—with the "utmost professionalism." He added, "We're not just a big contractor, we're a one-stop shop that likes to do a lot ourselves. We thrive on having our employees handle most of the projects."

Those employees are carpenters Josh Bulitz, Jeremy Bitter and Eric Loose, with Jaclyn Schreiner serving as the full-time administrative assistant.

Cory's wife Kristy also assists the business designing advertisements and doing graphic arts work as

needed. The couple has two children, Braxton, 5, and Dominik, 3.

Tim has been working only part time for the company for a while now and only one day per week since this summer. He will continue to do that through the end of this year, after which he said he plans to focus more on fishing, hunting and traveling.

"I feel good and comfortable," Tim said about turning sole operation of the business over to Cory. Asked what he liked best about his years in the business, Tim added, "I liked working with my hands. I like to see the end result. I really like the people."