

Roofing Contractor OF THE YEAR



For more than 110 years, the Riddiford family has been a fixture on the Chicago area skyline.

Family has always been the basis of a solid business foundation at Riddiford Roofing, and top-notch training and quality workmanship have protected the company's reputation for integrity — along with some of the most prominent buildings in the area.

The company's devotion to providing a safe and rewarding work environment for its employees and high-quality work for its customers that has earned Riddiford Roofing the 2011 *Roofing Contractor of the Year* Award in the Commercial category.

Ninety-five percent of the company's work is in the commercial and industrial arena, and President and CEO George Riddiford believes its workforce of approximately 150 employees can do just about anything. "Riddiford is certified for all roofing types including but not limited to BUR, modified bitumen, all single plies, liquid-applied systems, and various restoration systems," he said. "Riddiford also has experience with green roof installations."

Riddiford Roofing has always been family run. George Riddiford currently leads the company along with his sons, Joseph Riddiford and Christopher Riddiford, who serve as vice presidents. They strive to run a successful business and extend that family atmosphere to everyone in the company. According to George Riddiford, the key to success in the roofing industry is to build trust with both employees



The Focus Is

Roofing Contractor of the Year — Commercial
Riddiford Roofing



■ Completed projects include (from left) the Walter Payton Center at Halas Hall, 401 N. Michigan, and Manteno Elementary School. Photos courtesy of Riddiford Roofing.



■ Riddiford Roofing is based in Arlington Heights, Ill. Its management team includes (from left) Dave Noonan (Service Dept. Manager), Greg Carlson (Office Manager), Jason Doran (Project Manager), Chris Riddiford (Vice President), George Riddiford (President), Joe Riddiford (Vice President), Marco Cardenas (Service Dept. Superintendent), Steve Young (Superintendent), and Jay Tulley (Project Manager).

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Family

by Chris King



and customers. You also have to keep everything in perspective.

“As a family-owned business, we try to place everyone’s family at the center of our focus,” he said. “Safety and wellness training lets our employees know we value them and are willing to invest a great deal of time and effort to make sure they are able to come home to their families safe and well. This translates to high employee retention rate.”

“I have some of the best employees in the industry in all departments,” he continued. “A majority of them have been with me over five years and in a few cases over 30 years. We are a team and we wouldn’t be successful without our employees.”

Taking Care of Employees

The company works hard to provide a challenging and rewarding work atmosphere — and have a little fun as well.

“We always maintain a high level of professionalism in the office but also have fun celebrating birthdays and other events,” said George Riddiford. “We have an open door policy for employees with concerns. We have compassion and flexibility for personal problems and support family time when this occurs. We invest in the health and wellness of our employees providing annual physicals for the men in the field. We are constantly aware of weather and its effects on our employees and make accom-

modations whenever possible.”

The company takes a proactive stance on safety and health issues. “We try very hard to work with our employees,” he said. “We provide annual physicals. We do our own drug testing. I try to have a one-on-one conference with each employee before the season starts where we talk about safety, look forward and back at their career, and we set goals for the future.”

Riddiford Roofing makes sure safety is always the top priority. They’ve elevated safety training to an art with their Safety Day program. It’s actually two days — one in March and one in September — in which the company holds a safety training program that’s part lecture series, part “Safety Olympics.” It’s mandatory, but it’s also fun. It’s also a paid workday. The company invites representatives from insurance companies, law firms, and OSHA to speak. There are nine different safety modules, and teams have 20 minutes to get through each one. Points are awarded for tests and participation, and the winning team gets a prize that’s worth approximately \$300 per crew member. “It’s competitive, and they really fight for it,” said George Riddiford.

This year the company added a new wrinkle to Safety Day by making a donation to the Wounded Warrior Program, which helps injured veterans. For every employee who donated their safety day stipend, the company matched the donation. Almost everyone participated, and they

■ George Riddiford ranks the John Hancock center re-roof as one of the company’s most difficult projects. Crews worked around the clock seven days a week for two months.

raised close to \$10,000.

And if employees needed a visual reminder of what’s really important, Riddiford provided it. “For safety day, we had each worker bring in a photo of their family, and we put them all up on the wall in a big slide presentation,” said George Riddiford. “Family — that’s what it’s all about. At the end of the day, you want to go home to your family.”

A Thriving Family Tree

For the Riddiford family, it all began when George’s grandfather, Louis A. Riddiford, helped establish a roofing company in Chicago in 1901. “My grandfather and William Murdoch teamed up to form William Murdoch Roofing Company,” said Riddiford. “He continued to work there, and he had three sons — my father and two uncles. My dad, George Sr., branched out on his own and opened Riddiford Roofing Company in 1964.”

George Jr. got his start in the industry during his grade school years. His first job was passing out flyers for a residential roofing firm named Dependon Roofing Company. “My dad knew the owner, and they were looking for somebody, and I was too young to do anything for my dad, so they gave me stacks and stacks of these things to put on people’s doorknobs. I don’t know if it got them much business, but it kept me out of trouble,” he said. “Starting at about 12 years old I cleaned the office and then continued to work through my high school years.”

While he was attending college, George Riddiford started out as an apprentice roofer and worked for his father and uncle. His father had never encouraged him to join the business, but it seemed like a logical step.

“I didn’t know what I was going to do,” he said. “During my college years, I was an apprentice roofer for Local 11. I worked for my father and uncle at Murdoch Roofing Company on Chicago’s South Side. This provided valuable hands-on experience and provided me valuable insight in relating to the field workforce.”

More than four decades ago, George Riddiford took the helm of the company. It was the saddest day of his life. “I had gotten out of the Marine Corps and was ready to get married, and I had started working with the company,” George remembered. “Forty-four years ago, my wife and I got married, and my dad couldn’t go because he was up at the Mayo Clinic with cancer. He died the next day after our wedding.”



■ President and CEO George Riddiford followed his father and grandfather into the roofing business. He’s been at the helm of Riddiford Roofing for 44 years.

manship is essential. “We do a very good job. Our finished product is pretty damn good. We take a lot of pride in it, and the building owners see that. We try to protect the owners and educate them on what to expect as far as noise, constant pounding, drilling, traffic, etc. We try to keep them apprised of what we’re doing and how we’re doing it, so we aren’t leaving them in the dark for surprises.”

George Riddiford suddenly went from new roofer to owner of the company. “My mother and my wife helped me run the company, and we hung on to the business,” he said. “We rode through it. My goal was to run the business and one day to pass it on to my sons. That’s where we are today.”

He always hoped his sons would join the business, but like his own father, George Riddiford never asked his sons to enter the field. He wanted them to feel free to pursue whichever career interested them the most. “We’re happy they did come on board, and it’s worked out very well,” he said. “The real growth of the company came when my sons joined the firm.”

Joseph Riddiford and Christopher Riddiford joined the company about 20 years ago, and they started the way their dad had: as a laborer. Both men joined Local 11. “When they started working for me, they worked on the roof as apprentices, so they know what it’s all about,” said George Riddiford.

He believes their depth of hands-on experience gives his company an edge. “It’s a big deal,” he said. “You have to understand how tough it is. It’s a very labor-intensive business.”

Quality Craftsmanship

The company does its best to ensure that the labor-intensive work is done right. Riddiford is organized into two main divisions: project crews, which tackle large-scale jobs, and its service department, which handles everything from leak repair to smaller projects.

“All divisions are in constant contact with each other via radio and GPS systems,” George Riddiford said. “Our service division is able to react at a moment’s notice 24 hours a day to handle emergency leak repairs. They also perform Quality Assurance Program inspections for owners to provide preventative maintenance, which enhances the longevity of the existing roof as well as meeting manufacturer requirements.”

They’ve found that maintenance drives repeat business. “We are consultant, architect and manufacturer driven. We get a lot of our work through those means. But when we get in there, we’re able to hold them for repeat business — which is always the best kind,” said George. “Repeat business is invaluable to us.”

When it comes to impressing building owners, quality work-

The company ensures quality by investing in manufacturer training and having the same project manager oversee each job from estimate to completion. That way, nothing is likely to fall through the cracks. “At this time, we have five project managers, and they oversee the project all the way through. This way we build relationships with the customer, and we feel that’s important. When the project is done the project manager is always checking the roof to make sure it’s clean and neat, our flashing is perfect, and our sheet metal is sharp looking.”

Investment in company and manufacturer sponsored training has paid off. “We do a tremendous amount of training here,” said George Riddiford. “We call manufacturers in for demonstrations on things like flashing details, drain details. We practice them in-house so when we are out in the field, we aren’t practicing out there. We know exactly what we are doing.”

High-Profile Projects

The company’s quality work is on display at prominent projects all over Chicagoland, including the John Hancock Center, Water Tower Place, Merchandise Mart, Chicago Hilton & Towers, The Field Museum, McCormick Place, Navy Pier, Chicago Tribune, Walter Payton Center, Motorola, Northwestern Memorial Hospital, Chicago Federal Building, Alexian Brothers Hospital, Great Lakes Navy Base, Caterpillar Corp., Chase Bank Tower, and the Four Seasons Hotel. Many of these projects are profiled on the company’s website, www.riddiford.com.

“We see every job as having its own unique challenges,” said George Riddiford. “These challenges make the project interesting and can actually be fun. Projects in the city of Chicago seem to have the most challenges. At times, we will get the project manager and superintendents together to team up and discuss options.”

He points to the John Hancock center re-roof as one of the company’s most challenging jobs. “This project had people working around the clock seven days a week so the building was never left unattended,” he said. “It was a different type of job. Sometimes it would be windy on one side, and on the other side dead calm. Sometimes the clouds would come in, and we couldn’t even see the ground. In the end it worked out very well, and it was fun.”

Another unique project Riddiford points to is the green roof



■ Riddiford Roofing completed a multi-year restoration project at the Water Tower Place and Condominiums.

installation at the Bloomingdale's building on Michigan Avenue. The Bloomingdale's green roof consisted of a fully adhered Carlisle membrane and vegetative tray system with patio block walkways. Trays with the plants were transported up the elevator to the top floor, moved by conveyor to the cooling tower, and hoisted with a laddervator to the main roof.

"It was very challenging, a lot of fun,

and very high-profile," George Riddiford noted. "Semis came in with the plants — 16 of them in all — and they'd arrive at 3 a.m. and we'd work all day."

Family Ties

George Riddiford looks at the business his family has built with a great sense of pride. His sons are the fourth generation of Riddifords to enter the business, and watching them grow in the course of their careers has been a great source of satisfaction for him. "I really enjoy seeing them




■ The company is experienced in green roof installations, including this one at 900 N. Michigan.

take it on and learn — and learn from our mistakes," George said. "We all make mistakes from time to time, but our goal is to make a mistake one time and never make that same mistake again. They've become extremely well-versed in the industry, and extremely well respected."

George Riddiford hasn't put much thought into the next generation that might run the company, but he has six grandchildren — five girls and a boy — and although they probably won't be asked to join the company, you never know what the future might bring.

"There's nothing easy about this business," he said, looking back at a long career. But there are satisfying moments. "At the age I'm at, we're starting to replace roofs we put on 20-plus years ago, and I'm proud of that. I remember those jobs, and my sons ask me about them and I tell them all about it. I do enjoy that."

"Our slogan has always been 'A Trusted Name in Roofing since 1901,'" he concluded. "This started with my grandfather and continued with my father and uncles. I want to keep earning that trust with my customers and employees, as well as make sure this carries on through my successors. This is my mission." 

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