

Glass Inc.

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(L to R) Ron Jones, Robert Smith and Tommy Shepherd

Robert Smith is not the least bit superstitious about mirrors, which some people believe may prompt seven years of bad luck.

In fact, the most important professional advice he ever received was from his mother, who told him, "The best thing about glass is that it breaks!"

Smith capitalized on his mother's advice when he named his glass company after the one his dad started nearly 40 years ago. Starting with an experienced team of six people, each one averaging more than 20 years in the business, Smith formed Glass Inc. in 1999, working from a 5,000-square-foot building in Meridian.

Now located in a 35,000-square-foot facility, the award-winning Glass Inc. team has successfully completed more than 1,000 glazing projects over the years and has emerged as one of the South's largest glass companies. The company's resume includes casino, church, high-rise condominiums and hospital projects. To better service clients, Smith added two locations in Orange Beach, Ala., and Gulfport.

Also considered the premier residential and commercial glass expert in the area, Glass Inc. now employs more than 80 full-time employees and also provides work for another 10 to 20 contract workers on a daily basis.

Building a company

"There are many reasons people start a new company, but Robert's goals weren't just about making money," pointed out Beverly Joiner, Smith's first employee who now serves as company CFO. "He wanted to build a company that would last for generations and has taken the steps required to do just that."

A native of Greenwood, Smith's parents instilled in him at an early age the values of hard work, determination and giving back to the community. As a teenager, he grew up appreciating the small Southern

town pastimes of hunting, fishing, football and baseball. His first full-time job was selling Electrolux vacuum cleaners door to door. And his first important lesson was "just because you make \$600 your first week, you should not be surprised if you only make 59¢ your second," he said, adding that is exactly what happened in one of his first sales jobs.

By 1981, Smith had graduated from MSU with a bachelor's degree in construction engineering and "basically fell into the glass business," he explained. His father, Bobby Smith, had entered the glass business in the late 1960s with four friends. Together, they managed Glass Inc. in Greenwood.

Several years later, when Bobby Smith sold the business to Binswanger Glass, Robert Smith joined the larger company. "I actually went to work for Binswanger, the company that bought out my dad's business, because my dad knew some people there," explained Smith. "My first job with them was in New Orleans. Then, I moved to Meridian with the company in 1983."

Smith found Meridian the ideal place to raise his three children, Rob, 28, Justin, 20, and Kristen, 16.

Most valuable resource?

Today, Glass Inc. and Robert Smith are synonymous with quality glasswork in both residential and commercial settings. The company handles everything from mirrors, show doors and sunrooms in simple residential settings to working with architects on designing glazing systems for sprawling commercial complexes and skyscrapers. "The credit goes to our most valuable resource, our employees," emphasized Smith.

And, the sound of glass shattering hasn't made Smith wince once in all of his years in the business. He joked, "Like Mama said, 'The best thing about glass is that it breaks!'"