

Glass Inc. takes pride in projects of all sizes

Glass Inc., a residential and commercial glass company, based in Meridian.

Robert Smith is not the least bit superstitious about mirrors breaking prompting 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 more than 35 years ago. He began Glass Inc. in July 1999, with nine employees working from a 5,000-square-foot building in Meridian. Two years and \$5

million in sales later, Smith expanded his operation to 32 workers in a 35,000-square-foot facility.

Today, Glass Inc. is known across the Southeast as a business that prides itself on its work, no matter how big or small the job. The company's

glass has been used for hospitals, clinics, churches, condominiums and even hotels.

Smith's quick business success, combined with his extraordinary willingness to give back to his community, made him a natural choice for a local publication's 2005 Industrial Leadership Award. Organizations as diverse as Community Bank, Ponytail Broadcasting and Meridian Community College have asked him to serve on their boards of directors.

"There are a lot of goals when people start a new company, but Robert's goals weren't just about making money," said Beverly Joiner, Smith's first employee and now the company's chief financial officer. "He wanted a company that would represent a certain ideal, the ideal that every person takes pride in his/her work, and when that person has been blessed through work, he/she gives something back."

A native of Greenwood, Smith's parents instilled values of hard work, determination and giving at an early age. As a teenager, he grew up appreciating the small town Southern pastimes of hunting, fishing, football and baseball. His first full-time job was selling Electrolux vacuum cleaners door to door. His first important lesson was "just because you make \$600 your first week, you should not be surprised if you only make 59 cents your second," he said.

By 1981, Smith had graduated from Mississippi State University with a bachelor's degree in construc-



tion engineering and "basically fell into the glass business," he explained.

His father, Bobby Smith, had entered the glass business in the early 1970s 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 he happened to know some of the people there," said Smith. "My first job with them was in New Orleans, La. Then, I moved to Meridian with the company in 1983."

Smith and his wife, Fairie, found Meridian the ideal place to raise their three children, Rob, 26, Justin, 18, and Kristen, 14.

Today, Glass Inc. and Robert Smith are synonymous with quality glasswork in the residential and commercial settings, whether mirrors, show doors, or sunrooms in simple residential settings or sprawling commercial complexes.

"The credit goes to our most valuable resource, our employees," said Smith. "We now have 65 full-time employees — the majority have worked in the glass business most of their adult life — and work 10 to 15 temporary workers on a daily basis."

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!'"

