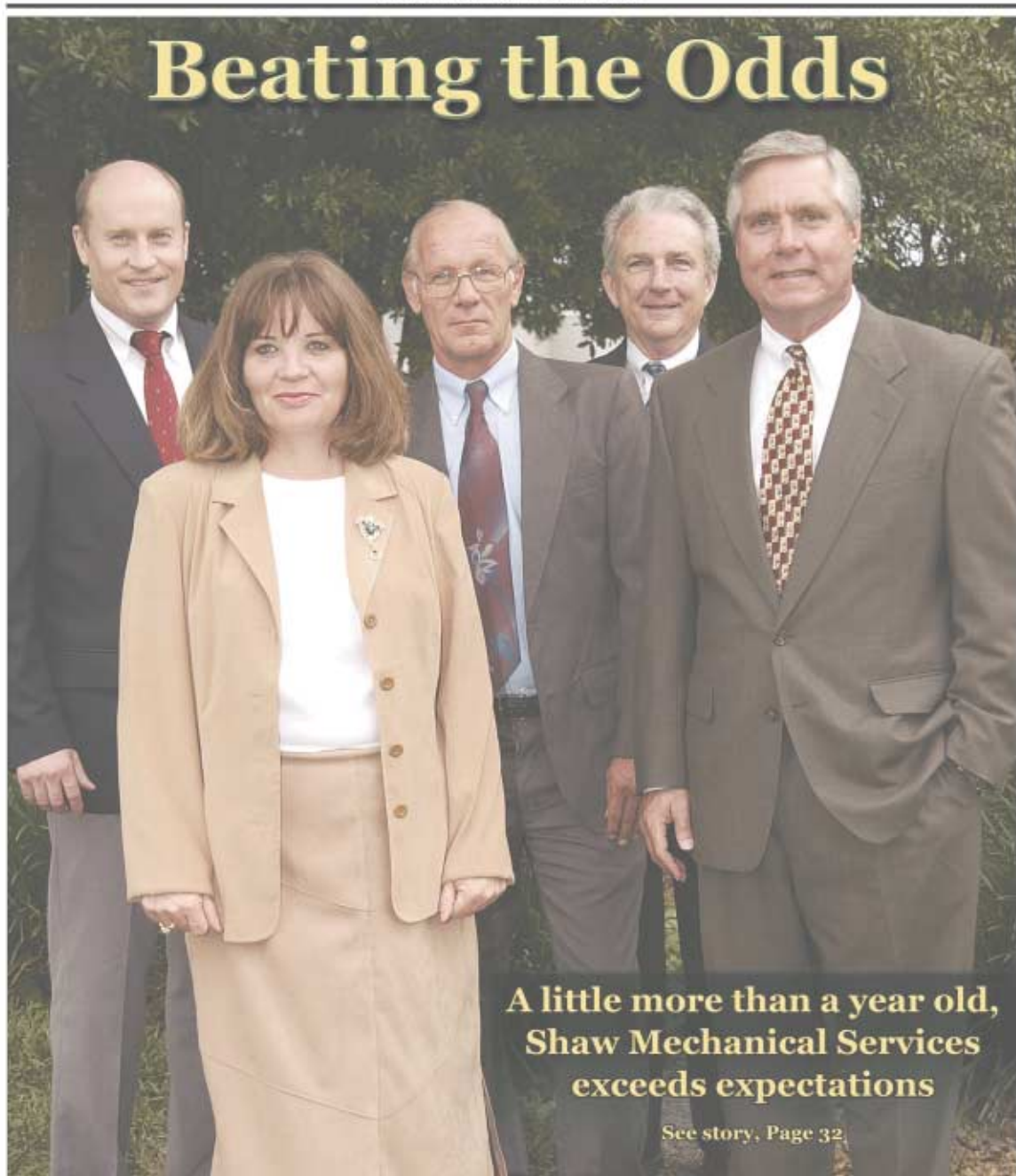


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Page 31

SPECIAL REPORT Commercial Real Estate



■ Photo of (L-R) Mark Woehrle, Terry Gamber, Michael Hendricks, Joseph Pence and David Shaw by Tanya Lundine

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Reputation, relationships help Shaw Mechanical grow

By **NOELLE HANER-DORR** Staff Writer

ORLANDO — When David Shaw left the comfort and security of his Trane Co. office for the last time on Sept. 10, 2001, he was full of hope for the future.

After all, he was supposed to embark on a new career path the next day, starting his own mechanical contracting and service company — Shaw Mechanical Services LLC.

He was not expecting the tragic events of Sept. 11, 2001.

Yet, in spite of the negative economic impacts of Sept. 11 — especially on the commercial real estate and construction industries — Shaw pushed on and succeeded.

Although Shaw's business plan estimated his new company would complete \$1 million in business during its first year, Shaw Mechanical far exceeded those expectations, signing \$4 million worth of contracts in its first 10 months of operation.

The key, say Shaw and others, has been his relationships with the Orlando business community.

"With his contacts, I knew David had a better chance than most to succeed," says Craig Montgomery, president and chief executive officer of Harper Mechanical LLC. "People know David, and they trust him. If he says it, he will make it happen."

In the beginning

Shaw's reputation and relationships helped him as he created his business plan, left Trane and pushed through the first scary weeks following the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

Shaw earned this reputation during his 24-year stint with Trane Co., a Tyler, Texas-based heating, air conditioning and ventilation (HVAC) company serving both the commercial and residential markets.

By the time he left the company, Shaw was managing Trane's \$30 million Orlando commercial sales division through which he worked with some of the top mechanical and HVAC service companies in Central Florida.

"After 24 years with the Trane Co., I wanted to do something on my own," says Shaw. "Half the people I know told me I was crazy, and the other half asked what took me so long."

His family supported him. In fact, Shaw's father- and brother-in-law, local developer Bill Robinson Sr. and Bill Robinson Jr., helped him bankroll the company's start-up costs.

In addition to his in-laws, Shaw turned to close friends and colleagues, like Montgomery, for advice. Montgomery and Shaw have been colleagues and friends since

1993. While with Trane, Shaw was the company's representative and salesman to Harper Mechanical.

Admittedly, Montgomery was one of the people who cautioned Shaw about opening his own business, while offering him support as well.

"I had some reservations about it," explains Montgomery. "I started my own company in 1969 in Detroit, and I let him know what the pitfalls were. We're all rooting for David, though, in every way we can."

'Begin with the end in mind'

When Shaw officially launched his company on March 1, 2002, his reputation and relationships came through once again.

When Shaw left Trane, he made a clean break, taking no business or employees with him.

As a result, on the first day Shaw Mechanical was open for business, the company staff included only Shaw and a service technician.

However, the company's office on North Rio Grande Avenue did not stay empty for long.

According to Shaw, his hiring philosophy echoes the major tenet found in Stephen Covey's book *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*: "Begin with the end in mind."

"I hired the right people and got them up front immediately," notes Shaw.

Shaw quickly began to fill positions with past clients and colleagues, such as Mark Woehrle, who now runs the company's construction services division, and Joe Pence, who runs the existing building services division for Shaw.

"I've known David since the late 1980s. The decision to work together was easy. We knew each other's resumes and philosophies," says Woehrle, who started with Shaw Mechanical on March 25, 2002.

After Shaw hired Woehrle, he courted Pence, a 40-year veteran of Central Florida's HVAC market. Pence and Shaw met when Shaw first joined Trane.

Says Pence, "I was very interested in what David was doing, and I wanted to be a part of it."

The hiring frenzy continued, and since opening the company a year ago, Shaw has grown his staff to a team of 40.

Work, work, work

Shaw's reputation in the industry has not been lost in the marketplace.

For example, when Shaw was bidding for the company's first job, he realized just

SHAW MECHANICAL SERVICES LLC



Top official: David Shaw, president

Type of business: An Orlando-based, independent mechanical contracting and services company

Established: March 1, 2002

Location: 2404 N. Rio Grande Ave.

Revenue: In the first 10 months of operation, Shaw Mechanical booked \$4 million worth of work and hired some 40 employees.

hours before the bid was due that he needed to post a \$10,000 performance and completion bond with the bid.

At the time, his bonding capacity was almost nil, but his reputation saved the day.

Shaw called David McLeod and Jack Prevost with United Heritage Bank. He told the men that he needed the bond for the project by 1 p.m.

It was 11 a.m.

Without hesitation, the men told Shaw to be in their offices in 10 minutes, and they would have a letter of credit ready for him.

"Since we've known David both personally and professionally over the years, we have every confidence in him and his ability to get this job done," says Prevost, who is the senior executive vice president for United Heritage Bank.

More jobs have followed for Shaw Mechanical, including a 16,000-square-foot building for Andrews Construction Co., sheet metal work for Harper Mechanical's job on Coleman Federal Prison and work with Florida Hospital, SeaWorld and Orlando Regional Healthcare.

"Shaw works through small company relationships with large company resources and expertise. That is the type of company we like to work with," says Todd Andrews, president of Andrews Construction Co.

Shaw uses praise like that to fuel his business and its future.

"Being involved in service doesn't mean building a job and never going back," explains Shaw. "I'm not building this business to climb up the ladder or be transferred to a new division. We're into customer share, not market share."

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