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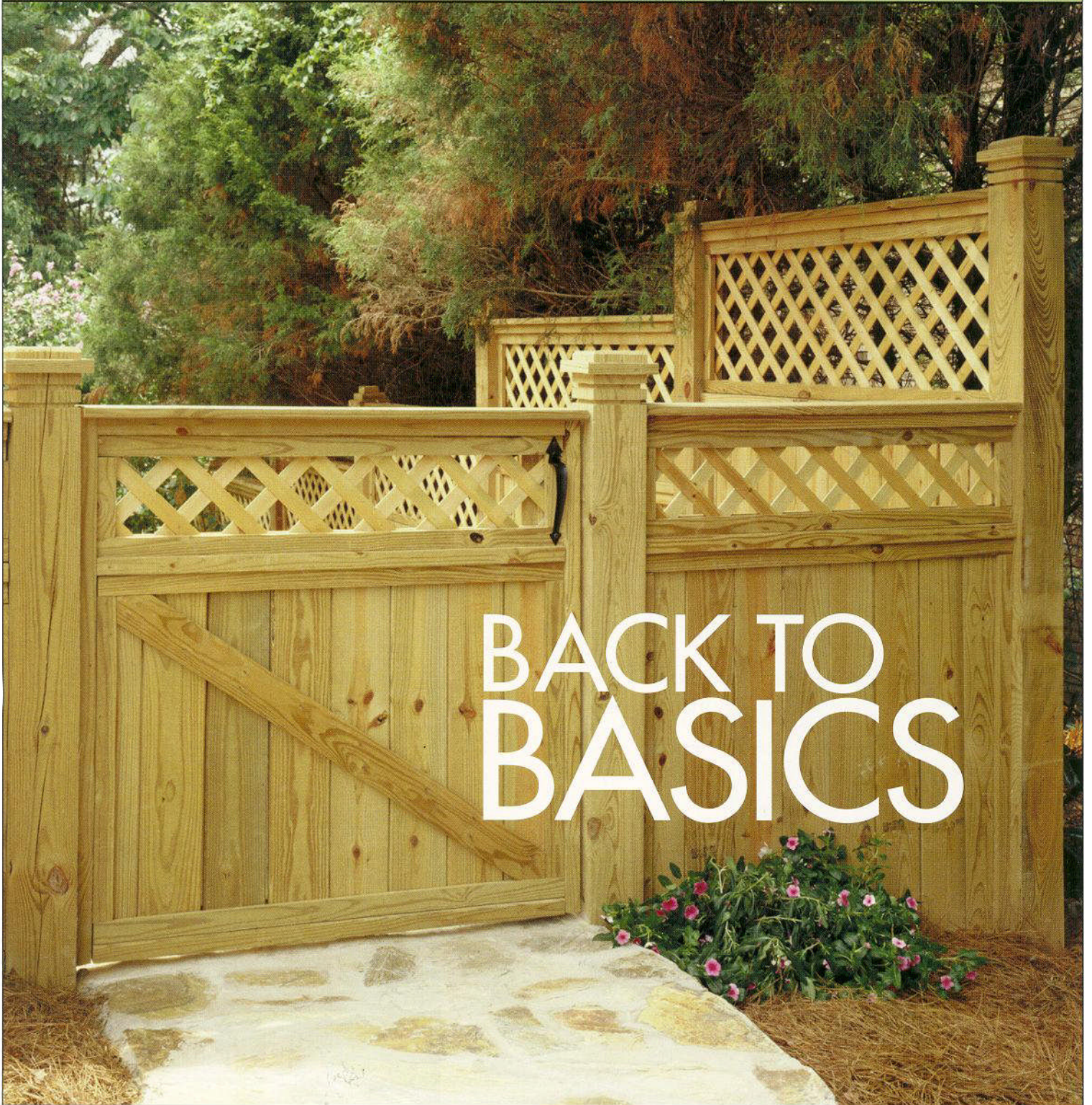
THE MAGAZINE OF FENCE INDUSTRY DECISION-MAKERS

MAY/JUNE 2008

MAKING MONEY IN A
TOUGH ECONOMY

SOMEONE YOU SHOULD KNOW:
PRESTIGE FENCE COMPANY

WRAPPING UP
FENCETECH/DECKTECH'08



BACK TO BASICS

Someone You Should Know

Broadcasting to the Fence Industry

George Tyll, owner of Prestige Fence Company in Oviedo, Florida, spent his entire working life in the broadcasting industry. After graduating from Ohio University in 1965, he spent three years in Germany as a sports broadcaster. He returned to the states and began a broadcast career that would last more than 25 years.

"There are a lot of hardships in that industry," Tyll said. "I lived all over the Midwest and Southeast working as a radio and television news director. You are constantly moving to better markets, and there is no job security. When I hit fifty I needed a change. I wanted a job that was not controlled by ratings."

So, Tyll turned to the fence industry.

Prestige Fence was founded in 1983. Tyll bought the business in 1997. Since then, Prestige Fence has flourished. "We have doubled the sales of the company each of the last five years and expanded the materials we install," Tyll continued. "The first owner was wood based, but I felt it was important to be open to all options."

The company sells and installs aluminum, chain link, PVC, wood and steel fences and gates. The business is about 60% residential and 40% commercial.

"We employ seven full-time employees, and during our season, which runs from March until October, we maintain two in-house crews and we subcontract for 2-4 additional crews as needed," Tyll said. "The crews are all cross-trained, so everyone can do everything. With that said, I do select crews based on their strengths. Some are stronger in wood, which can be a 'problem child' due to warping. Some of the crews are better suited to residential jobs, others to commercial work. You need to consider all aspects of the team and how they are suited to the job at hand."

Tyll believes his employees, especially

their experience, are among the biggest strengths of Prestige Fence Company. "You can sell anything, but the installers are where the final product is revealed. Our company is recognized for its honesty and integrity. We have a good reputation and we maintain the respect of those in the business. Those are things you cannot buy," he added.



George Tyll, right, with the rest of his staff from Prestige Fence Company.

Doing business in the current economy

Because the company is in a somewhat rural area that borders Orlando, Tyll says Prestige normally specializes in residential work. However, the economic climate is changing that. "This year we are doing much more commercial work. With the state of the economy, I think many homeowners are holding off on big expenditures. We are getting small jobs and some repair work in the residential market," he explained. "The big jobs are commercial right now. With commercial work, if the budget has been allocated, the company wants to get the work done before the end of the year."

Tyll keeps his business philosophy pretty simple. "I don't have a written Mission Statement. I believe what is important is the integrity of the company and the individuals that work there. I encourage my employees to go the extra mile, so the customer is glad that he went with us. That really pays off in repeat business. In fact, I got a nice letter today from a woman telling me how happy she is with her fence and that she would be glad to be a reference for Prestige Fence anytime. That is great PR."

Looking ahead, Tyll believes the biggest challenge facing Prestige Fencing right now is the economic status of the country. "It is hard to see the future right now with all the turbulence in the marketplace. It is not just the little companies that are having trouble right now, big firms are feeling the pinch and some are falling by the wayside," he said. "When the economy is this bad, all you can do is try to manage expenses, product costs, and salaries. Usually I buy panels pre-assembled, but lately I have had the guys build panels in-house because it saves some money and it helps me keep them all employed during these slower times."

Tyll believes that when business hits a slow period, it is important to take a step back and really look at what you are doing. "Are you running your company or is it running you? If you are out in the field selling and supervising, who is covering the office? I think to be successful you have to provide leadership in the office. It allows you to quickly address customer issues that crop up. In a perfect world you would have a partner, a second person that you trust like your wife, a relative or a

close friend that could share the work load at the office, but not everyone has that in their business," Tyll said.

Professionalism and the AFA

"Prestige Fence has been involved with the AFA for about eight years, through my participation in the local chapter. I am currently the President of the Central Florida Chapter and am working with others in the chapter to get more members to show up to the local meetings and participate in the local programs. Many members go to the national meetings but not the programs at the local level," he explained.

"I always belonged to a professional association when I worked in broadcasting," Tyll added. "The AFA and the CFP designation bring professionalism to our industry. The AFA represents our businesses at a national level, and I believe it is important to be involved in this organization to give back to your profession. While installing a fence is not rocket science, there are nuances in every job. It is important to take pride in your work."

"I have found the CD that was sent out of all the drawings to be very helpful. There is so much information available through the AFA; you just need to take the time to expose yourself to it. Commit the time; maybe it is an hour a week or two hours on the weekend, to read *Fencepost*

and the other materials available to you. Attend FENCETECH; get involved, that is where the real benefits are located. The value is there; are you taking advantage of it?" he asked.

Tyll is quick to point out that AFA has been important in helping understand the fence industry. "When I bought this company, I was new and untried as a manager of a company and as a fencer. The fence business is far removed from my previous life in broadcasting. But my life is now fencing and I love it. The AFA helped me learn and grow in my understanding of this industry. It continues to help me emphasize what my business is, a professional organization. I believe that is a value that customers will pay for."

"I am lucky, I realized at 50 years old I needed a change and I found a business that I really enjoy. In June 2007, I married my girlfriend, Brenda, and she will be joining me in the business later this year. Originally I was planning to retire at 72, but who knows, I may just keep going as long as I am having fun," he concluded.

For broadcasting his commitment to the

fence industry and the benefits that the AFA can bring to a contractor's business, George Tyll and his company, Prestige Fence, are Someone You Should Know. 🐾



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