

DO THE RIGHT THING

Jim Mitchell Leads *BHI General Contracting* With a Strong Sense of Integrity

by T.D. Christensen

When Jim Mitchell's two sons first began working with him at *BHI General Contracting*, they worried their dad was taking his work way too seriously.

"My boys always tell me I fall in love with my jobs," Jim says. "They used to think that was a problem, until they got out there and found out you really have to care about your work or it's not going to be what you want it to be. You have to have integrity. You have to do things the right way the first time."



Jim Mitchell prioritizes integrity, honesty, compassion, generosity and hard work, all of which he learned from his father. He credits this operating philosophy with BHI General Contracting's steady growth and impressive repeat customer base.

"Do the right thing" has become the official motto for Cincinnati-based BHI. Jim, 59, serves as the company's CEO and President, while his sons Luke and Brad are Senior Project Manager and Operations Manager, respectively.

"To us, 'do the right thing' means building every structure like we were building it for our family," says Lisa Ampaugh, Director of Sales and Marketing. "That philosophy extends to every aspect of how we do business—from how we estimate, to the quality we demand on a finished project."

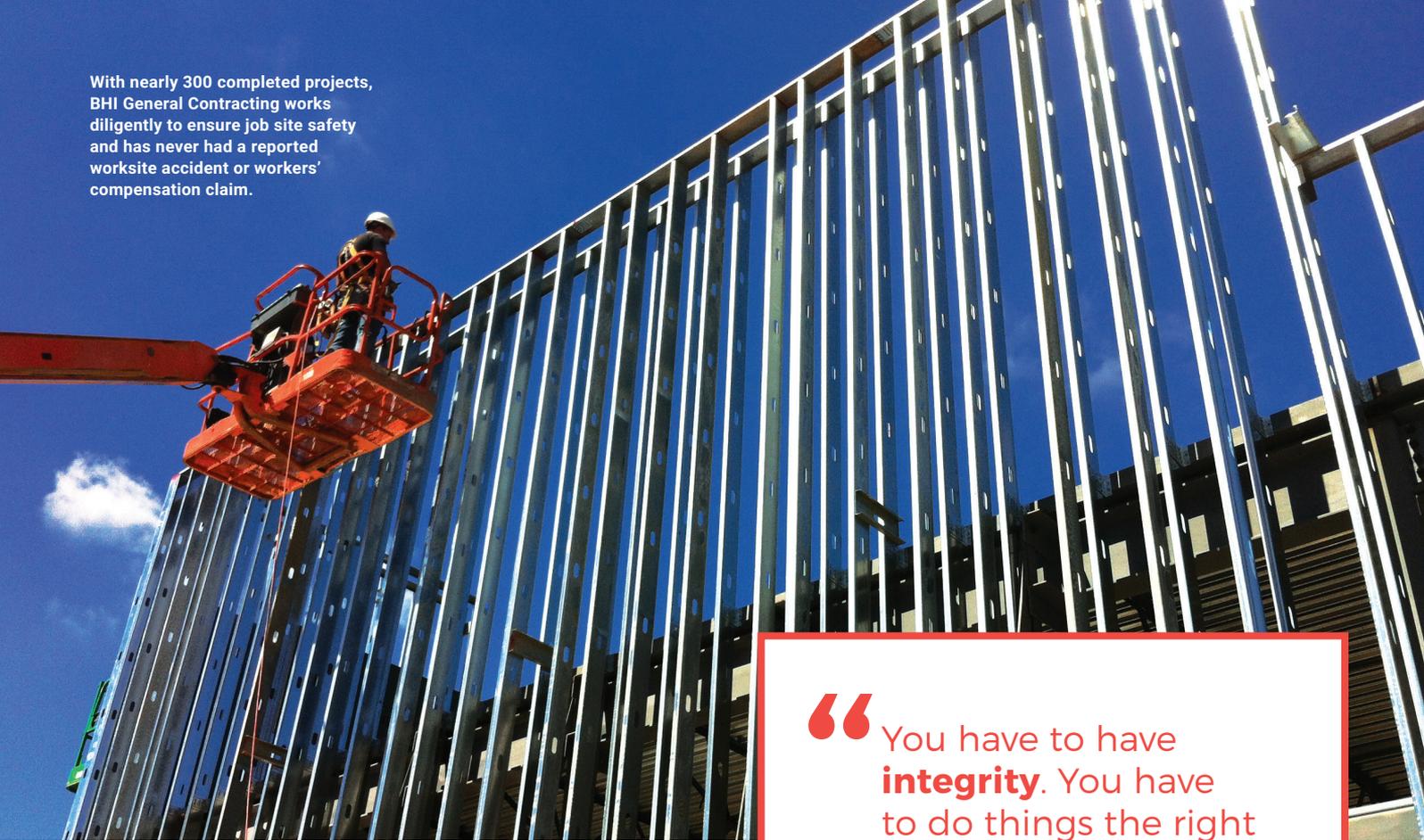
A GREAT MENTOR

The roots of BHI General Contracting go back to Jim's childhood in Cincinnati, where he learned how to build and fix things by watching his dad, Fred Mitchell, a civil engineer. As a teen, Jim went to work at his dad's company, Tri State Surveying.

"He's a great dad and a great mentor," Jim says of his father, who worked until he was 85. "He taught me to be as friendly as you can be...to do things right, be fair and be honest with everyone."

Of course, not everyone has those same values—a fact Jim learned the hard way. After 25 years as a salesman for a building materials distributor, Jim launched out on his own in the 2000s, first in the supply business, then in general contracting. At one point, he went into business with

ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF BHI GENERAL CONTRACTING



With nearly 300 completed projects, BHI General Contracting works diligently to ensure job site safety and has never had a reported worksite accident or workers' compensation claim.

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Jim Mitchell,
CEO and President,
BHI General Contracting

unscrupulous associates who left him more than a million dollars in debt, he says.

While he prefers not to go into detail about the ordeal, Jim says the experience strengthened the lessons his father taught him about integrity.

EVERYBODY PAID. EVERY DIME.

“I started this company in the hole. While I didn't personally owe anybody money, professionally we owed quite a bit of money to people,” he says. “Legally, we could have walked away, but morally, that's not who I am. It took 10 years, but I paid everybody back every dime.”

Jim and CFO Jake Jacobs built BHI gradually, first working out of a garage and slowly transitioning from residential to commercial general contracting. Today, with 19 full-time employees, the company tackles a wide range of jobs, from retail construction for restaurants to new buildings for auto service centers, strip centers and medical/dental buildings.

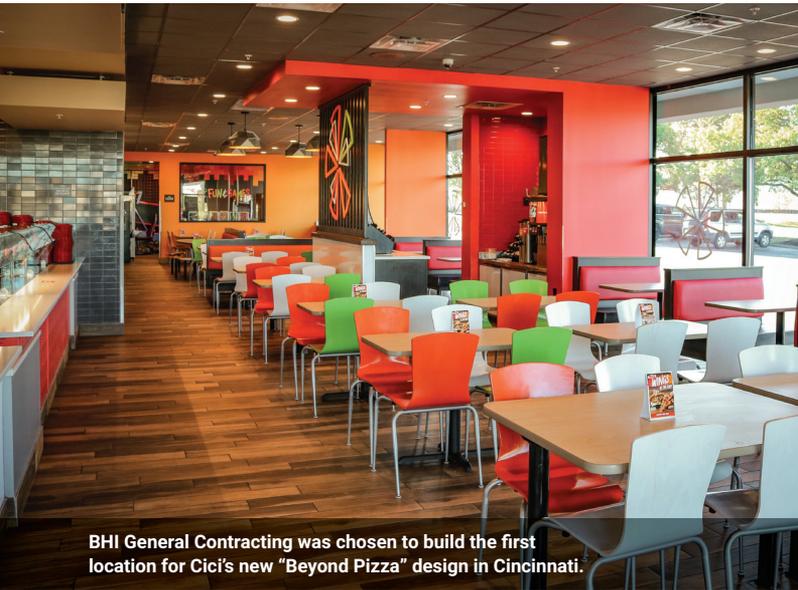
“As the company continues to thrive, its success revolves around partnership,” says Lisa.

“Jim doesn't just dictate from his office. We decide together how best to proceed and adjust together as a team,” she says. “Jim shares the financial details of the company and provides a level of transparency many owners would never provide to employees. We're a team in every meaning of the word.”

THE MEANING OF RESPECT

One secret to good teamwork, Jim says, is treating everyone with the respect they deserve—and knowing that respect inspires loyalty.

“I carry the guys through the winter, in the slow times, instead of laying them off. That might not be the smartest move for the bottom line, but I want to keep the guys happy and loyal. I don't want them to worry about not having a job,” Jim says.



BHI General Contracting was chosen to build the first location for Cici's new "Beyond Pizza" design in Cincinnati.



BHI General Contracting's extensive restaurant experience and loyal subcontractor base enable the firm to complete many projects ahead of schedule, including this MOD Pizza in Englewood, Ohio.

Keeping his sons Luke and Brad happy at work is fairly easy—most of the time, Jim says.

"You butt heads sometime, but not often. Ninety percent of the time it's wonderful, and 10 percent of the time it's a little stressful," he says.

"I have really good, level-headed boys who are a lot like me. Luke is more conservative, and Brad wants to take more chances. But they both do whatever they have to do to make things work. They aren't worried about who gets the glory," he adds.

LOOKING TOWARD THE FUTURE

Although Luke and Brad are both in their 30s, more than a few BHI employees are seasoned veterans—a fact that has Jim pondering the future of building and construction. The industry's talent pool seems to be shrinking year by year, he says.

"Younger people are into computers and tech and not a lot of them want to get into this business. There's a real lack of plumbers, electricians, framers—anyone who wants to get out and dig dirt," Jim adds.

"We're going to be okay because we spend a lot of time finding the right guys and getting loyalty from them, but the lack of subs is a problem in this business. General contracting is always going to be here, but it's going to be a struggle for some people," he says.

"The key to making it work at BHI is staying focused on the core values that the company began with," Lisa adds.



Two generations work together for BHI General Contracting's success. Shown from left to right are brothers Luke Mitchell, Senior Project Manager, and Brad Mitchell, Senior Site Superintendent, with their father Jim Mitchell, CEO/President.

"Integrity, loyalty, honesty, respect and compassion can't always be measured, but they are indispensable to success," she says. "Jim's a humble guy who doesn't like to self promote, but he makes this an incredible work environment, a place where people want to stay and work. He realizes there is more to building stable growth than just the bottom-line profits." 🐼

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