

DIRECTIONAL DRILLING

Keeping It in the Family

By Pam Stask



Above: Founder J.D. Young in 1999.
Left: J.D.'s sons Trevor and Troy took over the company after his death in 2004.

Tulsa Rig Iron Finds Its Footing After the Death of Founder

When Tulsa Rig Iron president J.D. Young suddenly passed away at age 51 in January 2004, his sons Trevor and Troy took hold of the reins to keep the company an important fixture in the trenchless industry.

For 17 years, J.D. built Tulsa Rig Iron (TRI) into a top manufacturer of directional drilling equipment. After their father's death, the two sons decided to step up to make sure the company, its employees and equipment production continued on. In 2007, Tulsa Rig Iron celebrates its 20th anniversary, but there were some obstacles and challenges along the way over the last three years.

Although the two had been working for their father since they were each 16 years old, neither had ever been in charge of the whole company. Inexperience and personal doubts were barriers they had to overcome, before they could begin to pull the ropes.

"There were some things we had to learn and learn quickly," says Trevor.

Decisions Needed

The two first debated about the future of the company and how they were going to keep it running. They knew that even though they were always a father-son business, they needed to continue on in their own way.

"We decided that we would run the company our way. We were going to do some things the same as [our father] and do some things differently," says Trevor.

Instead of dabbling in new business ventures, Trevor and Troy wanted to strengthen their primary business to ensure it was working at its finest. The two worked to develop strategies on how to reinforce their company's assets.

"We wanted to focus on our core business and make sure it was the best it could be," says Trevor.

Although Trevor and Troy assumed the president and vice president spots, respectively, in the company, the two men, along with their employees, still experienced mixed emotions with the new changes. The sons wanted to prove that they could maintain the company and the employees wanted to hold on to their jobs.

"There were fears and a fear of failure. Our employees were scared that they would lose their jobs," says Troy. "[Our father] was a real big fixture here and I think a lot of people thought the company couldn't survive without him."

While they were attempting to settle their own doubts, Trevor and Troy were also aware that their customers needed to be reassured about the company's survival. As an important presence in the trenchless community, TRI needed to stick around for its valued consumers.

"I think the biggest fear the customers had was whether the company would be around in six months," says Trevor. "We had to assure them that we would take care of them and that we weren't going anywhere."

Trevor and Troy began to weigh what ideals were important in maintaining the business. Their job now was to sort out what was important to their image and their customers. Quality was one thing that the two men knew they would not sacrifice when stepping in to the top spots of the company. They stuck with their father's dedication to the industry and continue to uphold their products to the highest standards.

"Tulsa Rig Iron has always been about building quality products for a fair price and that's still our motto," says Trevor. "We want to build the best equipment for the industry at a cost that's fair to the customer."

Once the new heads of the company proved they were fit for the job, they began to implement the changes and business decisions they felt were necessary to move forward.

They focused their efforts on their products and developing them to be the best they could. Trevor and Troy looked to their consumers for ideas and thoughts to improve and stay current with other trenchless equipment available in the industry.

"We're always listening to the customers and getting their feedback on our equipment. As the industry changes and new ideas come up, we'll always be there to work on them and try to come up with a better product," says Trevor. "If the customer has a problem that we feel we can help with, we'll always be there to design something better or new for them."

Customer service was another company aspect Trevor and Troy would remain dedicated to. In keeping with J.D.'s close care for customers, Trevor and Troy have continued to focus on providing superior service to their consumers no matter the problem — just as their father did.

"If a customer has a problem, we get on a plane, drive or whatever it takes to go see them and we take care of the problem," says Trevor.

Tulsa Rig Iron has maintained its quality sales representative team, as well as made a few adjustments. Even though they do not have a plane to jet across the country like their father did, the two still remain dedicated to serving their customers whenever and wherever they need to.

"We'll put people on a commercial flight and go where they need to go to take care of the customer, when they need it. We still respond to the customer," says Trevor. "We

have a lot less warranty and field service work anymore. We made a huge effort to make our products better."

TRI also added Mike Sadler to their sales team. Sadler joined TRI as a sales representative, traveling to meet customers and visiting different industry shows. With his industry experience, Sadler has helped reduce some of the stress Trevor and Troy feel, when attempting to do too many tasks at once. Sadler has also helped TRI branch out to new customers.

"He's gotten us to go see people that we wouldn't have necessarily gone to see," says Trevor.

Trevor and Troy also take pride in the improvements they have made when testing their products. The two formulated new methods and performed more extensive test runs, before their merchandise is sent to customers. The more extensive testing has made life a bit easier on the two. Testing the products at home, rather than fixing them later on, has saved Trevor and Troy from countless headaches.

So, what's next for Tulsa Rig Iron?

The two plan on continuing to provide quality directional drilling equipment to their customers. However, they hope to expand their manufacturing facility in the future to allow them to build more equipment with shorter lead times.

"We're at full capacity right now. We have every nook and cranny filled with people," says Trevor. "In order to do more, we have to build more facilities."

Pam Stask is an editorial assistant for *Trenchless Technology*.

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