

Building on Success

At an early age, Joe Yakesh realized that he wanted to work in construction. WITC helped make that dream a reality.

As a teenager, Joe Yakesh worked part-time for his cousin's construction company during the summers and on weekends. It was more than a way to make extra money—the experiences helped convince him to pursue a career in the trade. After graduating from WITC's Wood Technics program in 2005 at age 20, Yakesh launched Bloomer, Wis.-based Quality Construction & Remodeling LLC. He recently shared some insights into his passion for his work and the growth of his company.

What does your company specialize in?

When I first started, I did a lot of smaller projects—handyman, fix-it type work. While we still do some of that, last year we started getting into more custom home building. I'm the general contractor, and I hire all of the subcontractors. We also do a lot of remodeling, additions, siding, windows, decks, and garages.

Was it always your dream to own your own construction company?

Yes, I was always interested in this type of work and was fortunate to help my cousin with his company during high school and college, so I could see for myself that you could make a successful living in construction.

How many employees do you have?

Two. I started out small and don't want to grow too big too fast. I've seen other companies grow too fast, and I don't want to take steps backwards. I believe in building slowly and running my company with old-fashioned honesty. You've got to do the right thing in a small town—one bad job can affect you more than 100 good ones.

What are your primary responsibilities as owner?

I meet with every client and do all of my own estimates. I work with my crew as much as possible and check over everything myself. I'm a very hands-on owner.

What types of projects have you completed?

Everything from quick handyman projects to large custom home jobs. No job is too small, because we believe it can lead to bigger projects. Our business is all about word of mouth.

What are you currently working on?

We just finished a house, and now we're doing some decks, windows and door projects. We're also looking to land some additions and garages and find interior work for the winter, like hanging drywall, doing cabinetry work and installing flooring. I also build some of my own custom cabinets and am looking at eventually pursuing a stain and custom wood prefinishing shop.

Why did you choose WITC?

I think what separates WITC from other colleges is its attention to detail. It's a very well-rounded school, and the courses are carefully laid out. Each has a purpose and relates to the other courses. In addition to all of the hands-on training, including actually building a house in our second year, WITC offers courses in estimating and computer training, like CAD. I do my own estimating and paperwork, so that's been important. I also liked that WITC has a friendly atmosphere. You're known by your name—not as a number. The staff and instructors take the time to get to know you. Instructors were happy to sit down with students after class if they had questions.

How did your education prepare you for running your company?

Again it's all about the details. WITC gives you information on what to expect in the real world after you graduate. Instructors apply estimating and computer work with hands-on training.

What motivates you?

Satisfied customers really encourage me. Seeing someone's face when they're happy with the detail you put into your work is motivating. It's really a hobby that I get to do as a job. I'm lucky that I like to get up on Monday mornings and go to work.

—Liz Wolf



PATRICK KELLY