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NOVEMBER 2011

# Roofing Contractor



> **Chandler's Roofing, Inc.**  
Brian Hicks &  
Jorge Pena Sr.



# Roofing Contractor OF THE YEAR

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INTERNATIONAL ROOFING EXPO  
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# Roofing Contractor OF THE YEAR



**B**rian Hicks never wanted to have the biggest roofing company in the world — just the one that did the best work. After 35 years in the roofing industry, including the last 21 years as owner of Chandler's Roofing in San Pedro, Calif., Hicks has earned a reputation for top-quality work. His company has cemented that reputation with the 2011 *Roofing Contractor* of the Year Award in the Residential category.

Chandler's Roofing was originally founded in 1942 by Coy Chandler. After Chandler retired, Hicks, a longtime employee of the original Chandler's Roofing, re-incorporated the company under a new contractors license in 1990. The company currently has more than 20 employees and does all types of work, including commercial roofing, rain gutters, skylights, waterproofing, and custom sheet metal, but Chandler's is best known for its high-end residential work.

Past high-profile clients include Madonna and Sean Penn, Barbara Streisand, David Geffen, Joan Collins, Olivia Newton John, Johnny Carson, Diane Cannon and the Wrigley Ranch on Catalina Island. Recent projects include several homes for Donald Trump in Beverly Hills and Rancho Palos Verdes; Los Angeles Kings defenseman Rob Blake's home in Manhattan Beach; and Los Angeles



# It All Starts With

*Roofing Contractor* of the Year — Residential  
Chandler's Roofing, Inc.



■ Based in San Pedro, Calif., Chandler's Roofing has earned a reputation for excellent high-end residential work.



■ Employees of Chandler's Roofing pose for a group photo. CEO Brian Hicks (far left) credits the company's employees for Chandler's success.

**With**

**Quality**

by Chris King



■ Chandler's Roofing does all types of work, including commercial roofing, skylights, waterproofing, custom sheet metal and rain gutters.

Lakers coach Phil Jackson's home in Los Angeles. The company also installed the roofs in a Habitat for Humanity project in Lawndale, Calif.

## Getting Started

Hicks' start in roofing was anything but glamorous. One of his high school friends needed some help on a roofing project, and Hicks, then 17, pitched in as a laborer.

"The first job I can recall was a tile re-roof in San Pedro with my friend Richard Mavar," Hicks said. "His dad was a big-time contractor, and Richard and I worked with him."

After attending San Pedro High School, Hicks entered a local community college with hopes of becoming an engineer. He credits a heart-to-heart talk with his father during his sophomore year of college for helping him make the decision to enter the roofing industry.

"It's a day I'll never forget," Hicks remembered. "I wasn't sure what I wanted to do. I'd always had roofing work — weekend jobs, summer jobs — and I picked it up quickly and the money was good. School was a struggle for me, and my dad came home one day and we talked it over. He said, 'School's not for everybody.' He thought roofing would be a better fit for me. I had a surfer background and loved to work outside. About a week later I talked myself out of finishing school and was looking for a full-time gig in roofing."

He soon landed a job at Chandler's — but not without a struggle. "I answered an ad in the Daily Breeze, but they didn't hire me," he said. "I saw the ad a week later and I called back and talked to the boss. I asked him what happened, and he said they didn't hire me because they thought I was overqualified. I needed a job and talked him into hiring me. I basically had to beg for the job."

■ Brian Hicks' wife, Cherie Hicks (right), manages the office staff. She has been with the company 15 years.



The position turned out to be a great fit for Hicks and the company. Chandler's eventually made him a repairman, and all of his roofing experience came in handy. "I did it all — repaired flat, tile, shake, and composition shingle roofs," he said. "They could send me out on just about anything. I did hot mopping, tile, shingles, shake. We did a lot of shake in those days, and I just loved it. I loved the smell. Now it's almost all outlawed in California."

Eventually he moved into sales. "They quickly realized that I had other potential beyond roofing. They offered me a job in sales and I jumped on it. I already knew how to measure, and I knew how to do the job. I jumped right into sales and learned how to sell really well. I got to learn the whole industry from the bottom up."

## Constantly Improving

Hicks had a wealth of experience in roofing when he took over the company in 1990, but he realized he still had a lot to learn. But he had lived through tough economic stretches before, so he was ready when the economy went south a couple of years ago.

"I remember a day in January — two-and-a-half years ago — we were running 100 jobs on the backlog, and all of a sudden it just stopped," he said. "I had a meeting with the staff and I said, 'Now is the time to downsize.' As the owner of the company, you know the bills are there no matter what, so I threw myself back into sales."

The company had to cut back on some perks and benefits, and salaries were cut, but everyone kept their job and the company has positioned itself to succeed in any economic climate. "We work long hours, but we don't let it get to us," Hicks said. "We're constantly improving. There's always room for improvement, and we're always fine-tuning, fine-tuning, fine-tuning."

The company is a certified installer with many of its manufacturer partners, including GAF, CertainTeed, IB Roof Systems, Boral Roofing and Custom-Bilt Metals, as well as a member of the National Roofing Contractors Association (NRCA).



Chandler's is a GAF Master Elite Contractor, and Hicks credits that program for helping him improve his business on many levels.

"The training has been excellent," Hicks said, noting that he's benefitted not only from formal training programs, but informal discussions with his peers from all over the country. "The neat thing about the GAF program is that it's nationwide; you're working with people that don't compete with you, and you can share ideas. It's been very beneficial to us. We want to be the best and learn from the best, and we're working with these companies to meet and exceed those expectations."

## The Golden Rule

Hicks believes the key to success in the roofing world is to do exceptional work. It all starts there. He sums it up this way: "Our Golden Rule is 'It's quality, not quantity.' I'm not looking to be the biggest and baddest guy around. I just want to do high-quality work."

Great customer service is essential, noted Hicks, but the greatest customer service in the world won't help much if the roof leaks. And that's why the company focuses on quality workmanship. "We don't cut corners. We do things right," asserted Hicks. "Our priority No. 1 is: Are we doing it the right way? Is this the way you'd do it at your mother's house, or your brother's house, or your house? And if not, why not?"

The company ensures quality through extensive training and the hands-on touch of its top employees. Hicks tries to oversee every job he can, and when he can't be there, his most trusted employee is: Jorge Pena Sr. "He has been with me since the beginning," Hicks said of Pena. "He's just a super talent. He always knows just what we need."

Hicks credits Pena with training and developing the company's workers and making sure they use proper safety techniques and stay on top of new developments in products and application methods.

"When it comes to roofing, there's not much we can't do," said Hicks, who credits his employees' exceptional



■ Chandler's Roofing volunteered to install two roofs in a Habitat for Humanity project in Lawndale, Calif. Photos courtesy of Chandler's Roofing, Inc.

which adds to the family atmosphere.

"The only way to run a company is to have an owner who is hands-on and employees who work together," said Hicks. "We feel like we're a nice little family. It's a tough business, but everyone knows their job. We don't have high turnover. I was a roofer. I can relate to what they do every day. I know what they need, and I try to show up on every job."

## Teamwork Pays Off

Great communication was essential while re-roofing Phil Jackson's residence, noted Hicks, as work took place during the playoffs, making it hard to predict the work schedule. They stayed in constant touch with Jackson's personal assistant, who kept them apprised of Jackson's schedule. "We worked around his schedule, which was pretty tricky, but we made it happen for him," said Hicks. Another key to the job was specifying the right system. "He had a galvanized sheet metal standing seam roof that was all rusted," Hicks noted. "He lives on the beach, and the weather is pretty extreme. We recommended a GAF Golden Pledge lifetime composition shingle. It won't rust, and GAF backs up its workmanship for 25 years, with a 50-year materials warranty. He loved our work so much we also installed custom-made copper gutters."

Hicks' team excels on the jobsite, and it's now helping the community as well by participating in Habitat for Humanity projects in the local area. When GAF offered Master Elite contractors the opportunity to participate with Habitat for Humanity, Hicks jumped at the chance.

"Brian wanted to make sure we were involved," said Trevor Leeds, the company's marketing manager. "We contacted Habitat for Humanity of Los Angeles and told them we want to be an ongoing part of the organization. Two weeks after processing the paperwork, we found out there were two roofs that needed to be installed. It was perfect timing."

■ Brian Hicks has been in the roofing industry since he was 17 years old. "I was a pretty fast shingler back in the day with my little silver tray," he said.

work ethic for much of his company's success. "Most of our foremen have worked here 15-plus years," said Hicks. "Most started as laborers, and all of them worked under Jorge Pena. We keep the best of the best. All of our crews have been hand-trained by our No. 1 employee."

Employees must excel as individuals and work well together, noted Hicks. "We're a team," he said. "If I need a few guys at one job, I can move them over. We're diversified, and we've got great teamwork — and great players."

Management strives to keep an open door policy with its employees; maybe that's one reason many have stayed around so long. "Our doors are basically never closed," said Hicks. "We've all had bosses whose door was always closed, or the boss who was always gone — or just unavailable. When my employees or customers have a problem, my cell number is the 24-hour emergency line. If there's a problem, I want to know about it right away and make sure it's taken care of."

Lines of communication are kept open at morning meetings, when staffers update one another on ongoing jobs. The "backbone of the office" is Cherie Hicks, Brian's wife, who has been with the company 15 years and manages the office staff. There are several employees who have relatives

at work in the company,



According to Leeds, GAF donated the shingles, underlayment, and warranty, while Pacific Supply donated other ancillary materials. “Our foremen and workers stepped up to the plate and donated their time and labor for the install,” said Leeds.

“It was a fun project,” said Hicks. “Everyone in the company got out there, got their hands dirty, and we had lunch with the families. It was a great experience and it’s definitely something we plan to be involved with going forward.”

### Staying Ahead of the Curve

Chandler’s Roofing has embraced new technology, including interactive social media sites such as Facebook, Yelp and Angie’s List. Recent technology upgrades include iPhones and iPads for the sales team, and an updated website ([www.chandlersroofing.com](http://www.chandlersroofing.com)). “We’re a nice, family company, but we want to be ahead of the curve,” said Hicks. “And technology and the Internet is a big part of that.”

Hicks chalks up his company’s success to a couple of things: teamwork and quality craftsmanship. “Without good teamwork, it’s a really difficult business to run,” he said. “I know that with quality, our roofs won’t leak. When people hurry, they do. For us, it’s teamwork and quality versus quantity. We want to give our customers the best and safest choice. That’s what separates us from the other companies in our area.”

Looking back, Hicks credits his dad with helping him find the right path. “I hope he’s looking down on me today and is proud of me,” said Hicks. “I’m sure he is.”

*Chris King is editor of Roofing Contractor. He can be reached at 248-244-6497 or [kingc@bnpmedia.com](mailto:kingc@bnpmedia.com).*

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