

Business

Family cooperation underlies spirit of Cliff Buzick Inc.

By TERESA ENGLERT
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His daughter manages the
headquarters; his son is vice
president of the company. One
son-in-law operates the construction
company, while his other son-in-law
runs the lumber yard. His
brother-in-law is secretary-
treasurer of the firm, and his wife
is part-time clerk.

If you don't know by now whom
this describes, it's Donald Buzick
— president of three successful
companies whose ways he has learned
from experience that outsiders in
the executive hierarchy usually
don't work out.

That's the reasoning behind the
corporate structure of Cliff
Buzick Inc. of Bardstown — a firm
that is as solidly entrenched in
local history as the whiskey in-
dustry, and one which also owes a
great portion of its livelihood to
that industry.

Cliff Buzick Inc. consists of
three distinct companies — Cliff
Buzick Lumber Yard, Buzick
Construction Co., and Buzick S &
T Home Center — which are all
managed by family members.

But then, that's the way Donald
Buzick likes it. "Over the years,
my experience has been that
every person I've hired outside
the family hasn't worked out.

A lot of them would move
away, or lose interest for some
reason or another," the 57-year-
old said. "But all the family
members have stuck around and
worked out well."

Donald didn't decide overnight
to build a corporate giant staffed
with family members. He got the
idea from his own father, Cliff
Buzick, who originally started the
company back in 1937 during the
Great Depression. Even in the
beginning, the business was
highly dependent on the spirits in-
dustry.

"He started out as a salesman
of distillery equipment from
Ohio," Donald said, "but he soon
learned that the distillers didn't
have anyone to install the equip-
ment they bought."

It was that need which proved to
be Cliff Buzick's golden opportu-
nity. He moved his wife and two
children to Bardstown, hired
fewer workers and opened the Cliff
Buzick Construction Co. for in-
dustrial work.

Prospering in that business,
despite his lack of construction
experience, Cliff opened a
lumber yard in 1944 next to the
construction company.

Donald worked in his father's
company and learned the
business inside out as he was
growing up.

It was that close working rela-
tionship with his father that
taught him to rely on family
members for support and hard
work.

His father died in 1963 and
left the business in his lap. Donald
promoted his brother-in-law,
Jimmy Guthrie, to co-manager of
the lumber yard.

That arrangement worked
well, so Donald continued the
trade by eventually staffing
his entire administrative com-
plex with relatives.

Donald's son, named Cliff
Buzick in memory of his grand-
father, is vice president of Cliff
Buzick Inc., and is being condi-
tioned to take over the entire
operation in about seven years,
when Donald plans to retire.

"It's a very scary thought,"
25-year-old Cliff said about run-
ning the business, which currently

employs 60 workers. "It's a good-
sized operation, and a whole lot of
responsibility goes along with it.
It's been in the family for a long
time, and I hope it stays that
way."

Although Cliff realizes the
tremendous opportunity he has
been afforded, he says the posi-
tion is not as glamorous as it may
seem. It requires 60-hour work
weeks and a lot of attention to
details, he stated.

But then, that's the philosophy
behind the entire operation, ac-
cording to Donald.

"It's just hard work, and attend-
ing to even minor details,"
Donald said. "That's the way to
make a business successful."

Tommy Blincoe, who married
Donald's daughter Donna,
agrees. He joined the company
eight years ago, fresh out of col-
lege with a B.S. in biology. After
the road to medical school looked
long and extremely competitive,
Tommy accepted his father-in-law's
invitation to work as a
manager-trainee with the construc-
tion company.

"I had no idea I would end up
working with a construction com-
pany when I was in college," the
31-year-old said. "But there was
fierce competition to get into med-
ical school, so I just decided to work
here."

Tommy currently manages
Buzick Construction Co., and
says he enjoys working with his
wife's family, despite some
drawbacks.

"We have our differences and
everything, but overall it's very
good," Tommy said. "I feel like
I'm working out, and I think
we've got a good organization
from the top down."

The construction company,
which contracts for commercial
and industrial building projects
only, acquires about 75 percent of
its business from Nelson County,
Tommy said.

over," he added. "About 50 per-
cent of our business is related to
that industry."

Although they expressed con-
cern that new tougher legisla-
tion on drunk driving may curtail
business somewhat, both Tommy
and Donald said the trend in stiff-
er penalties has not affected their
industry yet.

"Everyone has expressed con-
cern, but we haven't felt any im-
pact on it yet," Tommy said. "It's
really hard to say whether it has
or not, really."

Tommy, whose pent five years in
Tennessee directing the renova-
tion of the Jack Daniels' dis-
tillery, said the key to the
Buzick company's success over the
years has been their loyalty to
customers.

"What we do is try to cultivate
good relationships with people we
do business with," Tommy said.
"Donald has been doing work with
some distillers for over 30
years. That says something about our
reputation."

"If you don't give your
customer good services, you
won't be in business very long."
Buzick currently does contract
work with Jim Beam, Barton
Brands Ltd., Heaven Hill and
Makers Mark in Nelson County,
and a few distillers in other states.

In fact, Donald said about 200 of
the whiskey warehouses located
in this area were built by his com-
pany.

"After the War (World War II),
we started building whiskey
warehouses, after Prohibition was
lifted," Donald said. "We
built 100 of them then, and we've
built about 200 here altogether."

Lumber yard
Ronald Richardson, who mar-
ried Donald's daughter Jamie,
manages Buzick Lumber Yard.
He started out seven years ago as
a clerk to avoid commuting to and
from his job in Louisville, and
also to secure permanent
employment.

Ronald says he enjoys work-
ing with his in-laws, even if it
means taking his work home with
him.

"When you leave a job like this,
you don't leave your work at the
office," Ronald said. "You go
home and discuss it with your
wife, because it's a family
business and you have more in-
terest in it."

"Before, when I worked at
G.E., when I left at the end of the
day I never thought about that
place until I went back the next
morning," Ronald said. "But this
is more of a position rather than
just a job."

Ronald said one reason he takes
pride in his work at Buzick is for
the benefit of his children.

"We're working for our future,
and our children's future,"
Ronald said. "I hope my children
will be working here someday."

Despite these added incen-
tives, Ronald said there are hardships
involved in working for
family members.

"You don't always say and do
what you would with a regular
boss when you get into working
with your family," Ronald said.
"You try to maintain your com-
posure."

Tommy said maintaining con-
tinual communication with the
president is the main ingredient
to establishing a good working
relationship with family
members.

"I discuss everything that goes
on with Donald, and the policies
we have," Tommy said. "I have



The corporate hierarchy of Cliff Buzick Inc. consists of Cliff Buzick, Donald Buzick, Jimmy Guthrie, Tommy Blincoe, and in front, Ronald Richardson and Susan Elmore.

Profiles in business

He said the company has never
dealt in residential construction,
because that would compete with
the business of other residential
contractors who purchase sup-
plies from Buzick Lumber Yard.

"We'd be competing against
Buzick Lumber Yard's
suppliers," Tommy said.
"You've got a conflict of interest
there — homebuilders who buy
from our lumber yard wouldn't
like it if they came in to buy
materials here and we tried to
undercut their bid or something."

That spirit of working together
is obvious in all aspects of the
Buzick empire. Tommy has also
found that a few other forces work
to make his industry a success or
failure.

Heavily dependent on the
distillery trade for work, Tommy
said his revenues fluctuate pretty
closely with the whiskey in-
dustry, and the general economy
overall.

"Everything is just a snowball
effect, or ripple effect, or
whatever you want to call it,"
Tommy said. "This year has been
better than last year, because
business investments and
building have been up."

"We do a lot of business with the
whiskey industry here, and all

to keep him informed of
everything that goes on. That's a
very, very important part of the
business."

Managing the lumber yard re-
quires a great deal of time and ef-
fort, Ronald said, because he has
to perform a variety of tasks —
keeping up with inventory, sign-
ing checks, scheduling trucks,
estimating prices and even
unloading trucks.

"We more or less do anything
around here to get the job done,"
Ronald said. "If that means
Donald or I have to stop what
we're doing to unload a truck, we
will."

"It's by far not a boring job," he
added.

S & T Home Center

Donald's daughter, 33-year-old
Susan Elmore, manages the
Buzick S & T Home Center.
Although her job may not entail as
much intricate planning as that of
her male relatives, Donald said
she has been successful enough

that he rarely overlooks her
operation or procedures.

"Best I can tell, all the men
come up here and tell the boys
that they want her to wait on
them," Donald said laughingly.
"She came in as a part-time
worker, and did real well, so I of-
fered her the manager's job and
she has been very successful."

Susan said she plans to retain
her position with the company
permanently, although she had
no such intentions when she first
started.

"I just wanted part-time work,
but I really enjoy the hardware
business," Susan said. "It's
something different all the time."

The final relative in the cor-
porate ranks, Jimmy Guthrie,
estimates the cost of materials
needed when homebuilders pur-
chase items from the lumber
yard.

"I would say he's given a
material estimate on 75 percent
of the houses built in Nelson Coun-

ty," Donald said of his brother-in-
law. "He started out helping me
in the lumber yard, and we both
sort of managed it until three or
four years ago."

Now serving as secretary-
treasurer of Cliff Buzick Inc.,
Guthrie has other respon-
sibilities, such as purchasing
various items, clerking, and
handling some public relations
matters.

Since he, Donald and a few
others are planning to retire at
about the same time, Donald said
he anticipates a turnover in the
company's personnel in about
seven years.

However, he hopes to have the
company running smoothly
before the transition occurs.
Right now, that means train-
ing his son Cliff to take over the en-
tirety.

"There's a whole lot to it, and a
whole lot to learn," Donald said.
"It just takes time. That's all it
took for me. There's nothing like
on-the-job training."

Factory orders rose in July

Orders to U.S. factories for
new manufactured goods rose 1
percent in July, partially offset-
ting a 1.6 percent drop the
previous month, the Commerce
Department said Thursday.

The nation's big retailers,
meanwhile, also posted
moderate gains in sales for
August compared with a year
earlier. Industry leader Sears,
Roebuck & Co. said its sales rose
8.1 percent to \$1.8 billion.

The level of factory orders,
despite their July advance to
\$125.4 billion, remained 2 per-
cent below their 1984 high point
reached in March, and that was
taken by many economists as
further signaling a slowing of
economic growth in the coming
months.

The 1 percent July gain com-
pared with increases as large as
4.6 percent posted last year as

the economy expanded rapidly,
pulling out of the recession.

This year the orders pace has
been slower, with declines
posted in April and June. Other
business barometers in recent
months have pointed to lower
growth. On Wednesday, the
Commerce Department said its
Index of Leading Economic In-
dicators was down for a second
straight month, the first con-
secutive declines in the
forecasting gauge in 2½ years.

In other developments:

About 375,000 Americans filed
initial claims for jobless
benefits in mid-August, a jump
of 24,000 from the previous week
and the highest level in a month,
the Labor Department said. The
weekly figures fluctuate more
than other employment-related
statistics, and most economists
still expect the government to

report at least a small August
decline in the national civilian
unemployment rate, which was
7.5 percent in July.

— Mortgage lending by U.S.
savings and loans totaled \$15.2
billion in July, down 14.3 percent
from June but still a record high
for the month of July, the United
States League of Savings Institu-
tions said. William O'Connell,
president of the trade group,
said the decline reflects a slow-
ing of the housing market's
"booming pace" earlier this
year and a "healthy sign for the
economy."

— The basic U.S. money supply
rose \$1.7 billion in August,
the Federal Reserve said, leav-
ing the supply within the growth
targets sought by the central
bank. But credit analysts re-
mained divided on whether in-
terest rates had peaked or are
headed higher.

THE
BEFORE THE
END OF THE YEAR
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