

Familial foundation keeps Yantis business strong

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Creighton A. Welch
Express-News Business Writer

In 2002, The Yantis Co. had \$35 million in revenue. By 2006, revenue was up to \$100 million.

That's about the time Mike Yantis Jr. and Blake Yantis began to work full time at the San Antonio construction company.

Cousins Mike and Blake are third-generation members of the Yantis line of management. They've recently been promoted to president and CEO, respectively. But their sights haven't always been focused on the positions they now hold.

"I probably went back and forth until I graduated," said Mike, who admitted he wasn't sure about working at the company his first six months there.



Mike, 27, graduated from Texas A&M University, came back to work during the summers and started full time right out of college. Blake, 26, defied the family tradition and went to the University of Texas at Austin, but his Aggie family welcomed him anyway. They both earned business degrees.

"Everything in school was definitely through the lens of Yantis Co.," said Blake, who also considered taking up his hobby, photography.

In 1965, John Yantis founded the company. His sons Mike Sr. and Tom then ran the company and are now co-chairmen of the board. The company has about 560 employees.

Yantis works on 50-70 projects at a time, including residential site work, commercial construction and public building. Right now, one of its largest projects is at what will be the new Tesoro Corp. headquarters, where Yantis is paving the way for two new roads. The project will run more than \$14 million, Mike said.

Mike oversees operations, such as the project managers and fieldwork. Blake runs the internal side, focusing on accounting, purchasing and development. The two cousins have their differences, but they said the differences complement each other.

"Blake and I get along great," Mike said. "It's a lot of fun working with him."

In a business with four Yantis, however, decisions are hard to agree on completely, whether it's about a multimillion-dollar project or a box of paper clips.

"We're all pretty hard-headed," Blake said.

But at the end of the day, they all come together, and the cousins are free to run the company.

"Mike (Sr.) and Tom are both brilliant in their own respects," Blake said. "We probably take it for granted."

When the Yantis cousins took charge, they wanted to increase their business relationships and to have more professional interaction with the companies they build for.

"We're more a partner," Mike said. "We've really created some great relationships."

Those relationships have helped Yantis maintain projects, such as the San Antonio International Airport, where the company has completed more than \$80 million in runways and taxiways since 1989.

"They are a fine local and family-owned business," said Doug McMurry, executive vice president of the Associated General Contractors of America San Antonio branch. "They're a well-known company with a great reputation."

Yantis has seen the correlation between relationships and growth.

"The quality of people we've been able to bring in has been the driving force behind us," Blake said.

Blake's dad, Tom Yantis, shares that sentiment.

"The single biggest reason for their success is the people they surround themselves with," Tom said. "I'm very proud of what they've achieved in a short amount of time."

Tom said their can-do attitude and lofty goals have helped them boost the business.

"I hope that they continue doing what they've done in the past five years for the next 20," he said.

Not yet in their 30s, the Yantis have found their age to be both an advantage and a challenge.

"It was real hard at first," Mike said. "But we try to get in and show these guys we know what we're talking about."

Both Mike and Blake agree their age gives them an aggressive attitude and gives them a fresh perspective on the business, which they are using to adapt with the market.

The current housing market slowdown has been a downfall, but Yantis has supplemented that by shifting to more commercial projects.

"We have always been successful in the residential market," Blake said. "In 2005 and 2006, that was probably 85 percent of our business."

Now, the projects are more evenly split between residential and commercial.

Mike also said public projects, such as school construction, will help them keep busy.

"We're diversifying and trying to have a balanced attack," he said.

That attack might include the Austin area in one to two years, Mike said. Right now, Yantis has projects only in the San Antonio area.

One of Yantis' obstacles seems to be an ongoing issue for all construction companies.

"Skilled labor is probably our biggest challenge," Mike said.

That should continue to get tougher in San Antonio, as workers will be needed for commercial, military and public projects.

cwelch@express-news.net