

Written by Stacey Taylor, Contributing Writer
Monday, 12 October 2009 17:46



When he was a boy in Waco, TX, Anderson Mitchell III never thought he would make his fortune in the construction trade. Although he enjoyed working with his father, who by trade was a framing contractor, Mitchell saw himself becoming a clean-cut businessman or entrepreneur making his fortune behind a desk.

“I used to think construction work was dirty work,” Mitchell admitted. “I only thought it was a good way to make fast cash. I did not like doing it; I just liked the money.”

In 1999, Mitchell moved to Minneapolis and worked various jobs including construction as he finished his Associates of Arts Degree at Minneapolis Community and Technical College (MCTC).

Mitchell now lives in North Minneapolis with his wife Lisa and two children Sierra and Max in the first home he bought in North Minneapolis.

Mitchell said it was not until he finished remodeling his home -bringing it up to code -and started working on his neighbors' homes did he change his mind about the construction trade.

“I thought I can be an entrepreneur and I can start my own construction company,” Mitchell said. “It just took off from there.”

In January 2004 Mitchell started his own business Mitchell Construction, www.mitchellconstructionmn.com, from the equity generated from his labors and equity from his property in North Minneapolis.

Last July Mitchell Construction was one of the subcontractors for the \$3.3 million dollar Minneapolis Public Housing Authority (MPHA) The Cedars high-rise enhancement project. Minneapolis awarded the management contract to Knutson Construction Services through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) to stimulate the economy in four urban areas.

Business Leadership Profile - Mitchell Construction: Enthusiasm, quality drive Northside entrepreneur

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Mitchell said the road to owning his own construction business was not straight or easy, but his experiences in construction prepared him for the skills he needed to build his business.

After high school Mitchell joined the army; moved back to Texas where he continued to work construction with his father and eventually moved to Atlanta, GA, where he pursued a career in sales. Between sales jobs, he worked construction and joined a framing crew building mansions in the suburbs of Atlanta. Later, he joined the crew building one of Atlanta's federal buildings. His big break in sales came when he landed a position at Bell South Advertising and Publishing and then MCI/Sprint of Atlanta.

When those jobs ended, Mitchell moved to Minneapolis to pursue his Associates of Arts entrepreneurial studies degree. He easily found sales jobs and became a top sales person at a Twin Cities eyeglass retailer. Mitchell met his wife while selling her a pair of eyeglasses.

But, Mitchell said, he eventually gravitated back to making better money with construction jobs. He said working with his father helped him stay steps ahead of the general laborer positions. Mitchell knew all about framing and reading blueprints, which made him more valuable on job sites. From 1986-87 his father was the main contractor for framing apartment complexes in and around Baylor University in Texas.

Mitchell said his father taught him one important lesson that has earned him success in the construction field.

"My (late) father taught me about the broom and the hammer," Mitchell explained. When he was 11-years-old, he was excited the first time his father took him on the job. He looked forward to working with his dad and looked forward to wearing the tool belt with the hammer. When they got to the site, Mitchell's father handed him a broom instead of the hammer. His father told him if he could trust him working the broom then he would graduate to the hammer.

"He taught me even though I have my eye on the bigger jobs, I had to do the smaller jobs well before I got to do the bigger jobs," Mitchell explained.

Mitchell said he continues to run his company that way. He built a relationship with the Minneapolis Public Housing Authority (MPHA) taking on smaller jobs like roofing and painting and eventually worked his way to managing over 70 MPHA properties.

"Minneapolis has endless possibilities for business growth, but it is similar to other parts of the country because it lags behind in opportunity for minorities" he said. "I had to educate myself to all variables to running a company beyond the hammer and the blueprint."

During the first months of starting his business Mitchell said he practically lived at J.J. Hill public library researching, learning about certifications and seeking out knowledge different community organizations had to offer.

Eventually, Mitchell enrolled in the Jumpstart Program sponsored by the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) where he learned better accounting and marketing and joined the

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Minnesota Minority Supply Diversity Counsel (MMSDC) and the National Association of Minority Contractors (NAMC).

“If I would not have joined NAMC I would not have been cognoscente of those programs,” Mitchell admitted. “NAMC gave me my first referrals. Minneapolis is like everywhere else because the playing field is not level. Relationships have been set and many bigger construction firms go back many generations.”

Mitchell admits he learned a few aspects of the business by having relationships with mentors. Along the way he made connections with some companies that worked with him and became his business mentors. Knutson construction sought out Mitchell’s company to show their support of Disadvantaged Businesses Enterprises (DBEs) firms owned by women and minorities.

“Growing up down south I always understood that I had to be twice as good as my counterparts,” Mitchell said. “I accept that life is not fair, but I don’t get down on the fact I am Black and a minority --I can’t let that stop me.”

Anderson Mitchell and his wife Lisa both sit on the Hawthorne Community Board and he chairs the Hawthorne Business Committee. (<http://hawthornecommunitycouncil.org>)

The Cedars enhancement project is to be completed in the spring of 2010.