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50 years of Valley Glass

By John T. Miller



From left: Brian Hersey, managing partner; Sherry Elliott, office manager; and Charles Whelan, owner. Photo John T. Miller

Valley Glass is celebrating its 50-year anniversary in the Saranap area, churning out windows and mirrors for local homeowners and businesses at the same consistent pace as when it first opened in 1967.

While not quite qualifying as a family-run business for all these years - Ben Wadsworth founded the business and sold it to Charles Whelan and Brian Hersey in 2013 - the new owners have kept the family spirit and the business model alive.

"We kept all the people and everyone gets along well," Hersey says. "The company runs smoothly because we have great people, with everyone striving to do the best they can."

Hersey, the managing partner, estimates he and Whelan spend almost half their lives at the shop, 10 hours a day, six days a week. He says, "We love what we do here and enjoy the work."

Whelan adds that he and Hersey have been working together on various projects for over 30 years. They have almost a brotherly rapport and genuinely enjoy their time together running the business.

"We don't do many big jobs," says Hersey, "and most of our clients are local." In fact, nearly half their business goes to the Lamorinda area.

Their longest tenured employee, Sherry Elliott, came to work for Wadsworth in 1977 and is currently the general manager in charge of the office.

Hersey gushed when asked about her. "She's the brains of the outfit and helps out with everything. She's got a great sense of humor and customers love her."

Elliott recalls that when Whelan and Hersey took over four years ago, they made some cosmetic changes with updates to the office and website and increased their marketing, but basically kept the same business model that had been successful for Wadsworth.

Asked about the impact of the upcoming Saranap Village, Hersey replied, "No real worries about it. We're excited about it bringing new people to the area and making the surrounding area look better."

The company has 10 employees and five trucks and, according to Hersey, they keep them busy every day: "We don't do giant jobs, but basically stick to local homeowners and businesses. We're good at what we do and things tend to run smoothly."

On the day of our interview, the company covered 14 different jobs, ranging from windows and mirrors, to shower enclosures, decorative frames and anything having to do with glass.

"Except automobiles," cautions Hersey. "It's tough to compete with the small garage business dealing with auto glass when they have so little overhead."

Naturally, broken glass is a hazard of the trade, but Elliott jokes, "If it weren't for broken glass, we wouldn't have a business." She added, "We salvage every bit of glass we can, making glass boxes or other small items. We even find uses for broken tempered glass, from filling flower vases to putting the pieces in fire pits."

And don't even mention any superstition involving broken mirrors.

Valley Glass is located at 1177 Boulevard Way at the eastern entrance to Saranap on a triangular piece of property. Wadsworth originally set up shop in the ground-floor space he rented from Louie LaRossa beneath the old family market. (See related story on next page).

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