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Jerry Meek is president of Desert Star Construction, which has an emphasis on sustainability and built some of the first LEED-certified residences and buildings in the Valley. NICK OZA/ABG

2nd-generation builder

'Rebellious' son puts company's focus on service, sustainability

By Georgann Yara
Special for the ABG | azcentral.com

He could've been hanging out with the wrong crowd, smoking or disrespecting authority.

But when Jerry Meek's father, a veteran homebuilder, discouraged him from going into the industry, his I'll-show-you move was following in his father's professional foot-

steps.

This path resulted in Desert Star Construction, the custom luxury homebuilding company he started with his father, Gerald, in 1978.

"My dad told me not to be a homebuilder. It was my form of rebellion," said Meek, president of the Scottsdale-based company, chuckling.

Meek, who was born in Chicago and moved all over the country before his family landed in Arizona when he was a high school freshman, recalled going to job sites with his father since he was 5. By junior high, he was working with

tools. It seemed like a natural fit, yet Gerald didn't want to place any expectations on his oldest son.

"He wanted me to do this, not for the love for him, but because I loved what I did," Meek said of his father, who retired from the business five years ago. "I still do."

The father-and-son business has grown since its early years. The projects have become larger and more intensive, and business has grown 230 percent since 1998, Meek said. His oldest son, Jeremy, is

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Aircraft-repair taking flight

By Parker Leavitt

Arizona Business Gazette | azcentral.com

Roy Hyde, president of Air Transport Components in Gilbert, certainly doesn't fit the mold of a typical corporate executive.

A Georgia native with a casual, friendly personality that makes him approachable and well liked, Hyde prefers to wear shorts and a hat to work, even when meeting with the higher-ups in other companies.

"I am not a suit-and-tie type of guy," Hyde said. "I've got six pairs of long pants in my closet, and they've still got the price tag on them."

He never went to college, having worked in construction after high school to help provide for the family after the death of his father.

From modest beginnings, Hyde has helped build his aircraft-repair business into a multimillion-dollar company, with room for more anticipated growth after moving to Gilbert in January.

For Gilbert, it's another feather in the cap for officials trying to build a stronger employment base in a town long thought of as a bedroom com-

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CONSTRUCTION

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the firm's sustainability projects manager, and Jerry's wife, Carol, handles the financial side of the company, keeping Desert Star a family affair.

Forming strong relationships with clients and valuing them beyond an invoice or project number has also remained key to the company's growth over the decades. Because clients' satisfaction is paramount, this sometimes means turning down projects if Meek feels compatibility among the builder, architect and client isn't there. Business is generated purely by referral.

"We make the conscious effort to treat each client like they are the only one. We feel like we create a relationship with each client ... and the relationship continues after the project is completed," Meek said. "That's part of what my parents taught me. Do what you say you're going to do when you say you're going to do it."

Judy Capra and Steve Brandis hired Desert Star to build their dream winter getaway

home in Paradise Valley. The couple sought out Meek after seeing examples of his firm's work while house hunting.

The two-year project was completed last May and became the first LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certified net zero luxury residence in Paradise Valley. The term refers to a structure with zero net energy consumption and zero carbon emissions on an annual basis.

The couple wanted to make their desert home as energy efficient as possible and are happy with the results. The constant communication throughout the process and after they moved in meant a lot to Capra and Brandis, who live in New York City for part of the year.

"Part of this was done long distance, and there was never a time when we had a question we put to the team and weren't given an answer within an hour or a few hours," Capra said. "That's part of what made it such a great process."

Brandis added, "Jerry was never anything but upfront. They went way over 100 percent in working for us, and it shows

when you see the house."

Growing up, Meek attended a total of 10 different schools by the time he graduated from Paradise Valley High School, where he met Carol in the concert choir.

At 14, he was a freshman at Tempe High School and started a landscaping business. He purchased a truck and hired someone to drive because he was too young for a driver's license. Some say the entrepreneurial bug bit early. But Meek admitted to a different motivation.

"I didn't like not having money," he said, laughing. "I needed a job and no one would hire you unless you were 16. But I actually enjoyed it."

When he was 18, Meek started a carpentry business with Gerald that serviced the custom home and commercial markets.

About five years later, architect and mentor George Christensen persuaded the men to get their general contractor's licenses. Christensen had given the Meeks projects and expressed frustration that no one else could meet his level of satisfaction.

"He asked if we thought

DESERT STAR CONSTRUCTION

Where: 8144 E. Cactus Road, Suite 840, Scottsdale

Employees: 19

Interesting stat: The green-building industry is projected to be worth up to \$248 billion in the United States by 2016, according to McGraw-Hill Construction and the U.S. Green Building Council.

Details: 480-744-1372, desertstarconstruction.com

about it and said, 'If you do, I'll keep you busy,' " Meek recalled of that conversation with Christensen.

Desert Star was born. The company started with construction and remodel jobs that other firms turned down and moved toward custom residential and commercial projects.

Decades of building a reputation helped cushion the recession's impact in 2008. Meek approached clients and asked if they knew anyone else who

needed a project done. The relationships they cultivated helped them weather the storm.

"It generated a lot of work. It's all because we've had the most amazing clients who support us. There's nothing of more value to a business," Meek said. "If you take care of clients they'll take care of you."

Also at this time, Meek added LEED certification to his firm's services. Currently, Desert Star has 14 LEED certified projects under its belt, including two homes that are net zero.

"If you want to improve, you're always stretching the envelope ... growing from each level of experience," Meek said.

Giving time and resources to community organizations and nonprofits as well as being generous to staff has gone a long way to creating a well-rounded business that feels more family than formal.

"People get so focused on performance, they don't think of the health of the people. A big part of what we do is focus on organizational health, not just performance," Meek said. "You can't have structural integrity without personal integrity."

AIRCRAFT REPAIR

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believes, there's plenty of room to add on as the company grows. The company also looked at sites in Chandler and Phoenix.

"This was a perfect situation because the size was great, and it had enough land to expand," Hyde said. "It actually was a perfect solution."

The success the company is enjoying now has come after countless days of long hours and hard work, beginning with Hyde's 12 years of service in the military.

Hyde joined the Air Force as



Greg Bolme gets to work on an Airbus interconnecting strut at Air Transport Components' new location in Gilbert.

AIR TRANSPORT COMPONENTS

Where: 900 N. Fiesta Blvd., Gilbert.

Employees: 70.

Founded: 1998.

Annual revenue: \$15 million to \$20 million.

Repair capabilities: Crew seats, landing gear, hydraulics, doors, gear boxes, engine mounts.

Details: atcphx.com.

April 2010.

While his partner took the money into retirement, Hyde was retained by the new owner to run the company for seven years, with two options for two-year extensions.

There are about 25 companies in Arizona and thousands of companies worldwide that do similar aircraft-repair work, Hyde said. The Federal Aviation Administration inspects repair stations at least annually and issues a certification.

Repair companies get worn and broken parts from airlines when either a problem is discovered or timing calls for re-