

By Bob Crossen

## Keep It Small & Simple

Family nurtures business from home base to own place

All-American Water Conditioning Inc., a business ran out of a family home in Jacksonville, Fla., for more than 30 years, has witnessed consistent success. It always has been a small operation, but at one time, it grew quite large with a stable host of sales personnel.

But it always returned to its roots, clinging to its original identity in the Miller household.

Rick Miller, owner and president of All-American Water Conditioning, said he likes the small size of the business—it employs five people in total—because it makes management easier. The Hague dealership focuses on rentals for consistent income, and advancements in business technology allow Miller and his salespeople to be more mobile.

That mobility is different from the early days of the business, when Miller's father, Jack, would walk door-to-door selling water conditioners. The business has a direct connection with many Florida living rooms, but none quite as deep as the connection to the Miller home.

### Growing Up, Moving Out

All-American Water Conditioning began in Miller's childhood home under the direction of his father, who started the business in 1968. For 33 years, the business called the house home.

"My dad worked from his home his whole life. The office was his home. ... Today, it's more internet-based and referrals," Miller said. Site visits for equipment installation and traversing neighborhoods for sales brought Miller's father out of the house, but much of the work was conducted at home.

Miller said he grew up constantly surrounded by his father's work—small parts were stored in the house; large equipment was held in offsite storage—and his father's business continued to grow as Miller matured.

Miller officially joined the company in 1975, when he was 21. He moved out of the house, but the business stayed there until his father died in 2001, at which point Miller took over the company. He enlisted



Left: Rick Miller sits at his desk. Until his father Jack's passing, the business lived in his childhood home. Right: Service technician Chris Morefield installs a product at a client's home.



the help of family members to move the 33-year-old company into its own place for the first time.

The business matured as newer technologies were introduced. Treatment devices became more effective and efficient, and under Miller's direction, the business adapted to the rental business model and the digital world.

### Electronic Efficiency

Gone are the days of paper invoices and filed receipts at All-American Water Conditioning. Two years ago, the business made a digital switch. Miller issued his employees tablets, which they bring to each job. Rather than fill out paperwork on site and mail the customer an invoice at a later date for completed work, clients can pay on the spot with a credit card.

"I've gone paperless," Miller said. "Everything happens [on site] on a tablet, so it eliminates a lot of work in the office."

Invoices do not get duplicated. Tasks done in the field do not get lost or forgotten when filing paperwork. There is still plenty of office work, however. Miller commended his business manager, Kayla O'Kelley, for keeping the core of the business—phone calls, scheduling and book balancing—flowing efficiently.

The digital structure keeps the business' financial information up-to-date, and Miller can see the information when it is most convenient for him.

"I can wake up in the morning, take a look at my tablet and see what's going on as far as how my business is doing," Miller said. "I don't feel like I'm so tied down to the office. Things are more mobile these days."

While the business does not live in Miller's home—like it did in his childhood—it does visit through his mobile devices. That mobility has provided him a better work-life balance and business stability.

### Long-Term Stability

While the number of employees at the business may be small, the size of its service area is not. With offices in Jacksonville and Fernandina Beach, Fla., All-American Water Conditioning reaches customers as far as Callahan, more than 20 miles northwest of Jacksonville.

Miller said he likes working directly with people. He shows clients the

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difference between treated and untreated water, and how his business can help improve their water quality.

Water hardness can range from 15 to 30 grains in the company's service area. At that level, the Water Quality Assn. considers the water to be extremely hard. Because high hardness is so common, Miller said he has not struggled with helping a family overcome this water quality concern.

"There [are] still a lot of people out there [who] don't even know what they are, but yes, a lot of people do have water softeners," Miller said. "It's a popular item here in north Florida, for sure."

People are treating more than hardness, too. Reverse osmosis systems have become popular among north Floridians, and residents want to remove chlorine from their water. Accessibility of equipment has helped in that regard, and as clients buy from Miller, more people learn about the offerings.

"Basically, we do a lot of good work and get a lot of referrals," Miller said. "I have tried different things and advertising over the years, but I have just found I like running things the way I like running them. I just keep it simple." **WQP**

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