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Woody Jarmon GFS Texas

In the 1970s when many people were worried about work being slow, Woody Jarmon was steadfastly keeping his focus. In his chosen trade, automatic fire protection, he was working through a union apprenticeship program and then further honing his skills as journeyman.

In all, Jarmon has devoted 40 years of his life to fire protection. He is the president and owner of GFS Texas, 1375 River Bend Drive in Dallas.

The company provides commercial and industrial fire protection systems for existing buildings and new construction in private and public sectors across Texas, Oklahoma, New Mexico, Louisiana and Alabama.

His story is one of persistence, meticulous attention to detail and the ever-present desire not just to earn "a" job from a client, but future jobs, too.

Jarmon has flirted with retirement for the last couple of years – drawn by the lure of his cattle ranch, fishing with his wife, a growing number of grandchildren, and a dog named Cowboy. But, until then, he's in the office three days a week, advertising his company on new social media networks and serving clients.

How did your career in fire protection begin?

I went to work for Bell Fire Protection in the 1970s. They were bought out a couple of times and ended up as Wormald Fire Protection out of Australia. I worked as a field superintendent until 1985. Then I started my business here in Dallas with a partner. We owned two companies – one in Dallas and one in Houston. After four or five years, I sold my shares of the Dallas operation and went to Houston.

But, you were destined to come back to Dallas, weren't you?

Yes, I purchased a company out of Austin that was going into receivership in the early 1990s and "cleaned it up" over a year or two. I brought it to Dallas as a branch of the Houston company I was a partner in, Green Fire Systems. And basically that's how it ran until 2005 when I

purchased the assets and it became mine in 2005. That's when I changed the name to GFS Texas.

Your original plan was to go into the furniture business with your dad, but he died at a young age. What happened then?

I had two friends who were in this trade. When I was 20, I was working in the research and engineering department of Frito-Lay. My friends were working for LaDew Fire Protection. They told me about the fire protection business. It was a union trade and I'm still union today.

In fact, you are a union supporter, aren't you?

I've been union all my life. My company is union. We're proud to be union contractors. I've had a lot of guys who have worked for me for over 20 years or I have worked with for 40 years that are just now starting to retire. I think sticking with the unions, staying with your thoughts and beliefs in that, I think that's been one of the highlights.

Is it a different environment for unions today?

It really is. Texas is a right to work state. When I got in the trade in 1970, there were no open shop contractors. There were only five large union contractors and over the years they've all went by the wayside. Today in the Metroplex, there are still seven or eight union contractors. It seems like a lot of people go for the low dollar, but then again, there are people who still want quality and a company that will stand behind everything they do.

Can you explain the basic aspects of the fire protection business and how it has changed?

The components of the business are to sell, design, fabricate and install fire protection systems by all state, local and city codes, in a timely manner, within the range of the job schedule. In the old days, we had our own fabrication shops, but today we purchase pre-fabricated systems from independent fabrication contractors and install them.

In the 1980s when the high-rise boom hit, there was a need for small contractors that could do tenant work in office buildings. So we started in business doing that type of work. Over the years, it's changed and evolved into larger ground up projects, along with the tenant work and a strong emphasis on the service and inspection market. At GFS, we have a service and inspection department, a special hazards department, and new construction.

Are buildings today considerably safer?

Very much so. In the 1970s, very few buildings in Dallas had sprinklers – only your heavy commercial manufacturing interests were thought to face probable fire damage. In those days, it was about



The team that leads GFS Texas: Rodney Warlick, vice president of sales/operations; Chad Jarmon, vice president; and Woody Jarmon, president and owner.

protecting buildings, not lives. Today most any structure over 5,000 sf is required to have fire sprinkler systems, even houses. Now there are some cities – Frisco, Addison parts of north Dallas, Highland Park – that require fire sprinklers for homes.

Buildings are substantially safer today compared to what they used to be. The fatality rate for buildings equipped with fully functional fire sprinkler systems is zero.

On a different note, I see that GFS Texas has a Facebook page. How did that come about?

I think you need to advertise in any market you can. The computer age is here and you need to adapt with the times. My son, Chad, keeps our Facebook page updated. He and Rodney Warlick run the daily operations of the company and keep me updated on the decisions that need to be made.

Your Facebook page mentions several employee activities, including a recent blood drive.

We had a blood drive for a former employee who retired eight years ago. With the help of current employees, friends and former employees we were able to secure over 100 pints of blood in his name.

How else do you engage your employees?

We have about 60 field employees and 19 office employees. We have Christmas parties and stop for birthdays for a few minutes. We usually do three to four cookouts per year along with retirement parties.

Tell me about your family members other than Chad, who you've already spoken about.

I have a daughter Carly Jarmon-Gil, who is married to Benji Gil, formerly of

the Texas Rangers and Anaheim Angels. He went to and won the World Series with the Angels in 2002. He's now a player-coach in Chihuahua, Mexico.

When my daughter was still Carly Jarmon, she was Miss Teen Texas in 1992-1993 and Miss Texas in 1995-1996. At that time she was the youngest Miss Texas ever and the only person to hold both titles. She also competed in Miss America in 1995.

My wife, Diana, is a retired emergency room RN from Baylor Hospital in Irving.

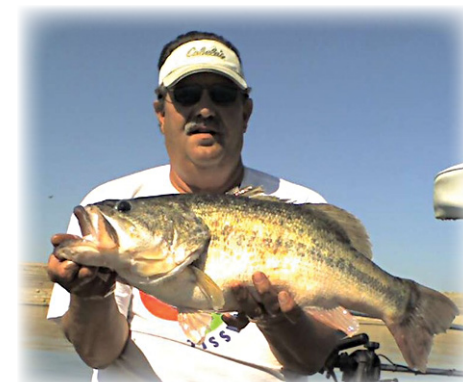
We enjoy bass fishing at several lakes in Texas, with our favorite being lake Amistad in Del Rio.

Do you have any plans to retire soon?

I've been trying to retire for the last couple of years. I'm working harder at it this year.

I live in a small addition on Richland Chambers Lake in a community of mainly retired couples. My wife and I enjoy many good times with them so it's hard to come home and stay a few days and then go back to work in Dallas.

I work in Dallas three days a week and the other days I am on my ranch in Corsicana, Texas. I have 472 acres with Santa Gertrudis cattle that keep me busy along with 10 grandkids and a White Labrador named Cowboy. –mh



The big one doesn't always get away. Jarmon shows a prize catch.