

# *A View from the Top* **What's Up in Roofing**

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Jeff Knudson sizes up a house from the top down.

For almost three decades, Knudson has been in the roofing business, from laborer to field supervisor to estimator, project manager, salesman and business owner. For the last few years, he has owned Roofstar, based in the East Valley — providing repair and installation of the most common roofs such as shake and shingle to the more leading edge such as steel.

“I have a passion for roofing,” he says, with a smile. “People often look at me a little funny about that — especially those who’ve been up on a roof in July patching their mother-in-law’s shingle roof. But, it’s true: I enjoy doing the work, overseeing the work — and owning a company that people can trust.”

A single proprietor, Knudson employs a small group of experienced roofers, whom he can, in turn, trust, and spends much of his day monitoring his projects: a commercial asphalt roof, perhaps, in Chandler at dawn; then a traditional shingle installation in Mesa; next, perhaps, a foam flat roof in Scottsdale in the early afternoon. “By 3 o’clock, when our crews usually break, I’ve already been up since 4 a.m. and I’m tired. But, it’s a full and fulfilling day.”

## **Not in Kansas Anymore — but Still is**

All along, Knudson has retained a commitment to providing not only a quality roofing job but also a quality estimate. In a roofing market more and more dominated by large firms whose business is predicated on big dollars and high volume, Knudson maintains the spirit of the neighborhood contractor. If a roof needs to be replaced, do so; but if it doesn’t, tell the owner the less expensive options. “I do get a real satisfaction providing an honest assessment on what they have — and what really needs to be done,” he says.

And most consumers suffer from two disadvantages when they’ve called a roofer, he explains. For one, they don’t know roofing. “People have no idea about the business, specifically, how to troubleshoot their roofs.” And second, this is the worst time to learn. “It’s monsoon season in the Valley, they have multiple leaks, their ceilings are stained. They need expert advice quickly, and a repair or replacement even quicker.”

Knudson picked up the apple-pie American values from his upbringing in Colby, Kansas. Colby is a small town — “The Oasis on the Plains” — just off Interstate 70 in the northwest part. Knudson attended college there, actually studying to be a flutist. Then, with a group of friends, he began a young man’s journey on the road through America, finally ending up in Houston, Texas. “We were having a lot of fun but we needed jobs, so we signed on with a roofing crew.”

From this slap-in-your-face experience — the heat and humidity of Houston and hot asphalt simultaneously — Knudson began his career as a roofing mechanic for a company in Denver, Colo., soon moving up to foreman and salesman and supervisor shortly thereafter. In the middle ‘80s, another company in Denver offered him the opportunity to open an office in Chandler in the booming Valley of the Sun. Here he estimated roof contracts for a variety of first-line builders, including Richmond American, Elliot Homes, Crane and Del Webb.

Before starting his company, he worked for one of the largest roofers at the in the Valley, Universal Roofers, where his work as a division manager had him scheduling 800–900 tiles roofs annually on a \$2.5 million Sun City West contract. So, he’s experienced the business from all vantages, small business to large business: “I’ve seen the roofing business up and down, inside and outside.”

## **Materials are Tougher — but Business Remains Tough**

In many ways, the business has changed during the last quarter century, Knudson says. Many of these are improvements favoring the consumer, in fact. From the municipal standpoint, for example, code regulations are tougher: Registered contractors are held to higher standards for installation — many of these pegged to national and international codes such as the UBC and the ICBO. And, generally, quality contractors are doing better work today as a result.

Then, too, because of the Arizona Registrar of Contractors, consumers have an organization that they can speak with before hiring a roofer (a must, he says) and, just as importantly, an organization that can help out if one of their members does not perform according to contract and industry standards. “We all participate in a fund that is used to ‘fix’ problems that the Registrar acknowledges are,” Knudson says. “This is a very strong protection for the consumer.”

Materials are better, too, as a result of improved manufacturing and quality control. A basic shingle roof, for example, properly installed and maintained, will last a good 15 years, even in the Valley sun, he says. And new technologies, such as spray-on foam, are making the once-nightmare flat roofs extremely efficient and tight. And for the wealthy consumer, roofs made of materials such as copper are designed to last for a century.

Still, Knudson says, he sees materials improving still. And, he believes that regulations and codes can also be tougher, putting higher standards on quality contractors — and putting less-than-quality contractors out of business. “We can still improve what’s required of contractors,” he says. “We can still do a lot to require even higher workmanship standards.”