

FAMILY OWNED BUSINESS SPOTLIGHT

Family is wired for electrical work

The McChesney name is known in Clark County for three generations of electricians

BY JESSICA SWANSON | of the VBJ

Justin McChesney is a third-generation electrician and business owner. It all began with his great-uncle Gerald McChesney, who owned Mac Electric in the mid-80s, then his father Andy McChesney who founded A & M Electric in 1998. Today, Justin McChesney owns Just-In-Time Electrical, Inc., which he founded shortly after asking to be laid off from his dad's company during the Great Recession.

"It was 2008, and my dad was having a hard time. He kept us going longer than he should have," said Justin, noting that his father, like his great uncle, employed many family members. "He worked hard and I wouldn't want to see him deplete his retirement."

After a couple of years working for different companies, Justin decided to start his own business, based on his observations of the market and other – more personal – factors.

"There was a need in Clark County for a reputable business to stand by the homeowner," he said of the local electrical industry at the time. Also, A & M was primarily a commercial contractor, and Justin didn't want to compete with his father, so he went into residential. He struck an agreement with his dad to subcontract for him on residential jobs, helping his father's company and at the same time bolstering his new business.

"By the second year in business, I was too busy to help anymore," he said.

From a humble beginning working as a sole proprietor out of his Hazel Dell garage, Justin moved from there



Courtesy of Just-In-Time Electrical

The wiring for downtown Vancouver's Feral Public House was a job that Just-In-Time's Foreman Jesse McChesney was particularly proud of.

to a shop at a Camas home, then to a storage unit. He incorporated the business in 2016 and moved into a space in "contractors village" on 121st Avenue in Vancouver, doubling that space shortly thereafter. This year, Just-In-Time Electrical is celebrating its 10th anniversary, and the company just signed a five-year lease on a brand new space in the Padden Commerce Park earlier this month.

Justin kept a nearly perfect GPA in high school, with a special interest in business. He assumed he would go to a four-year university after graduation. He asked his dad, "How much money do you have put away for me to go to college?" His dad chuckled and said none, but that he could offer him a job as an apprentice electrician. He dove

in headlong and became a master electrician by the age of 22.

Justin said the first five years of the business moved slowly, while the last five flew by. He plans to use the next five years to begin stepping back from the business. He said he always "worked to live, rather than lived to work," and his goal is to be available to the business, while at the same time handing it over to his employees to "make their fortunes, to build a retirement for themselves."

Today, Just-In-Time does about 2,000 residential jobs per year, and has nine employees including Justin. He said he prefers to create a job for the right person rather than try to find the right person for a job he needs to fill, and each employee had their own unique on-boarding process.

Drawing on tradition, the company is comprised of about half family, including head estimator Randy McChesney, Justin's uncle who also worked at both Mac and A & M, cousin and second-year apprentice Stig McChesney and brother and foreman/journeyman Jesse McChesney.

According to Justin, there is no particular perk to being in the family, other than being more susceptible to straight-talk. Each employee works their way up, and is subject to the same vacation days, PTO, full benefits, incentive programs and required instruction as everyone else. Clarity and transparency are key to the whole operation.

"It doesn't matter who you are," said Justin. "It's how you contribute."