

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Life safety for schools, hospitals, business

The eyes and ears of Southwest Building Systems

BY JILL SWANSON
BUSINESS JOURNAL

Mention family and David Thornhill's eyes light up.

"Family is the most important thing in the world to me," said the president of Southwest Building Solutions. "It's why I do what I do every day."

For Thornhill, family is more than the five generations of his immediate family. It includes his 16 employees and their families. And it includes his clients and their families, and the people who rely on his products and their families. It's a large clan and keeping them safe is a commitment Thornhill doesn't take lightly.

Southwest Building Systems is a local leader in life safety and communication systems. Whether it's fire detection, security systems, surveillance cameras, lighting and sound systems or any of the other systems SBS can provide to its customers, the company's goal is the same. They want to provide the best product and service to do the job the customer needs.

Thornhill estimates that 90 percent of his business is commercial.

"We work with school districts, hospitals, hotels, local businesses and the Texas Department of Justice to make sure they have the best systems available," said Thornhill. "We don't sell the customer more than he needs. That's not what we are about. We don't use fear to sell our services. We want to educate him about what we can do to secure the premises, identify the weaknesses and blind spots that may lead to problems so they can leave their business every day knowing it's secure."

In the case of a building security system, that may include unobtrusive outdoor cameras, motion sensor or dusk to dawn security lights as well as the intrusion detection systems. Security can also include access control by either a swipe card or punch keypad.

"When setting up a security system we have to think like a thief," admitted Thornhill. "When we put an SBS shield in front of a business, we want that sign to inspire confidence in the right people and fear in the wrong people."



David Thornhill, president Southwest Building Systems



When I came president of SBS in 2006 I knew I had earned the job," he said proudly. His son has been with the company for five years, making it a three-generation family business.

Safety and education are key components of SBS's relationship with their customers. Safety and education are also key components with his employees. "I don't want to send my people into the field to do an installations with a manual to follow. Our employees attend training classes for all the products we offer," Thornhill said. "They are familiar with every aspect of a system before they work with it in our customers businesses. We also have regular in house meetings to deal with customer service and safety issues.

We reinforce safe driving practices often; we have a lot of big trucks on the road in this area and safety reminders can't hurt."

The current headquarters of SBS in Silsbee is not fancy admitted Thornhill, but he noted there is a reason for that.

"We want to invest our money in training so our customers get the best we can offer, keep our vehicles in good condition and working safely, and make sure our great employees are well compensated for the work they do," he said.

In the end, you realize Thornhill's approach to the business has an almost holistic feel to it.

"Our customers know we are always there for them. I won't sell a system and vanish; we are always available for service and inspections. We want long term relationships," he said. "I want my customers to have peace of mind, knowing our systems are working at their peak performance level. I lay my head down every night confident that is the case."

Having presented his business philosophy to a visitor, he turns to more important matters.

"Now," he said smiling, "ask me about my granddaughter." ■

Southwest Building Systems provide security and fire alert systems for several school districts but the services go beyond that.

"We provide intercom systems, clocks connected to the bells, internal paging, and professional sound systems in auditoriums and on sports fields. The in-room audio visual systems have kept up with available technology, screens and projectors can be mounted on a ceiling tile and lowered when needed," he said.

An unfortunate need on school campuses these days is a mass notification system in the event of an incident. On a campus the first warning would be a flashing beacon to warn of trouble. Contacts to police and rescue departments are made. Cameras in and around the buildings will help locate the problem and magnetic locks can be tripped where necessary.

Southeast Texas Medical Center and Baptist Memorial Herman Hospital are also customers of SBS.

"Think of what is needed for a hospital to run smoothly," said Thornhill. "In addition to the security and fire systems we have talked about, there are nurse call buttons, a small but very important part of patient care. Intercom systems to call codes and emergencies are vital."

Hotels such as the MCM Elegante and the Holiday Inn rely on SBS for fire protection. Guests' rooms are isolated, people may be sound sleepers and not hear an alarm, but the in room voice over system can help relay emergency information and instructions.

George and Betty Thornhill sold their family Airstream trailer and began Southwest Building Systems in their garage in 1981. After working in the electronics industry for his entire career, the elder Thornhill decided to strike out on his own. He passed away in 1999 but Betty remains CEO and keeps a hand in the business today. David, who had an established career in banking, joined the firm 27 years ago.

He jokingly tells of how he imagined a desk and a secretary at the family business, only to be told by his father to put on some work boots and get out into the field, where he spent 15 years learning the systems from the ground up.

"It was the best education I could have had," remembered Thornhill.

When his father died, Thornhill was not handed the title of president.

"I worked with my mother to develop the qualities and experience needed to take that job. When I be-

CHAMBER NEWS

THE GREATER BEAUMONT CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

Halloween Express
Mrs. Tricia Jackson
10058 Cedardale Dr.
Houston, TX 77055
(409) 225-7418

Lifestyle Health Plans
Mr Kerry Kisslinger
4106 Windy Woods Ct
Kingwood, TX 77345
(281) 796-6214

Skye Salon and Spa
Ms. Thu Truong
4310 Dowlen Suite 7
Beaumont, TX 77706
(409) 892-7593

Hampton Inn
Ms. Donna Woodside
3795 IH-10 South @ Walden Rd.
Beaumont, TX 77705
(409) 840-9922

Premium Plumbing Company
Mr. Shuan Vonfeldt
P. O. Box 21576
Beaumont, TX 77720
(409) 842-0997

Southeast Texas Interfaith Organization (S.E.T.I.O.)
Mr. Jonnye Williamson
3617 Gulfway Dr.
Port Arthur, TX 77642
(409) 982-1510

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

OCTOBER 26

Chamber Mix & Mingle
4:30 PM to 6:30 PM
Neches Federal Credit Union
1955 Dowlen Road
Beaumont TX 77706

OCTOBER 27

Board & Advisory Meeting
3:30 PM to 4:30 PM
Greater Beaumont Chamber of Commerce
1110 Park St.
Beaumont TX 77701

OCTOBER 28

Annual Meeting and Spindletop Award
6:00 p.m. By Invitation
7:00 p.m. Annual Meeting and Entertainment
Julie Rogers Theatre for the Performing Arts
Beaumont TX 77701

OCTOBER 29

Ribbon Cutting
11:00 AM to 11:30 AM
Classic Chevrolet Cadillac
3855 Eastex Freeway
Beaumont, TX 77706

NOVEMBER 1

Ambassador Lunch
Noon to 1:00 PM
Hilton Garden Inn
3755 IH-10 South
Beaumont, TX 77705

NOVEMBER 3

Ribbon Cutting
9:00 AM to 9:30 AM
Glen's Express Collision
2615 W Cardinal Dr
Beaumont, TX 77705

NOVEMBER 5

Ribbon Cutting
11:00 AM to 11:30 AM
Skye Salon & Spa
4310 Dowlen Suite 7
Beaumont, TX 77706

NOVEMBER 10

Ribbon Cutting
11:30 AM to 12:00 PM
H & R Block
4875 Concord Rd
Beaumont, TX 77703

NOVEMBER 11

Membership Lunch
9:00 AM to 2:00 AM
Holiday Inn Beaumont Plaza
3950 IH 10 South
Beaumont, TX 77705

Chamber Mix & Mingle
4:30 PM to 6:30 PM
The Grill by Arfeen, Smith & Payne
6680 Calder Ave.
Beaumont, TX 77706

NOVEMBER 16

Executive Committee Meeting
7:30 AM to 8:30 AM
Greater Beaumont Chamber of Commerce
1110 Park Street
Beaumont, TX 77701-3004

NOVEMBER 17

Ribbon Cutting
11:00 AM to 11:30 AM
Agriland Farm Credit Services
1305 South Major Drive, Suite A
Beaumont, TX 77707

NOVEMBER 18

Chamber Mix & Mingle
4:30 PM to 6:30 PM
Petals Florist, Inc.
770 Neches
Beaumont, TX 77701

NOVEMBER 30

Ribbon Cutting
SETMA (Joslin Partnership)
10:30 AM to 11:00 AM
Southeast Texas Medical Associates, L.L.P.
3570 College Street
Beaumont, TX 77702

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Beaumont Business Journal
contact one of our
Sales Executives
at 409.832.4178



Christopher Cross performs at annual Chamber meeting Oct. 28, at the Julie Rogers Theatre

Jim Rich, President
Greater Beaumont Chamber of Commerce

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thoughtful responses by both political parties. Locally, we have to create and maintain a great business climate to compete for projects, and we have to get hungry in our approach to business retention and recruitment. We look forward to engaging two chamber divisions in approaching our economic development future in the months ahead.

I am pleased to welcome Tara Vincent as our new Administrative Assistant and Dale Champagne as our Membership Sales Manager. At the same time, we streamlined our non dues revenue efforts with Shirley Bartos, Senior Vice President, taking on the Total Resource Campaign for 2011. We have expanded the roles of Brandy Stegall and Tina Marshal, and Rene Latiolais is our new Director of

Membership Development & Relations. Elizabeth Stubblefield will handle Communications & Information Technology. On the economic development side, Cheryl Kizer and Jessica Hill are rolling along with Hurricane Ike loans and new SBA 504 real estate loans. Jessica is also coordinating responses to several strong business location prospects. Jessica will attend year her second of training to get formal certification as an economic developer.

I want to take this opportunity to thank the entire staff for a great year and to wish them well with their new roles and challenges.