

Westchase Engineering Firm Enters a New Era

EHRA Celebrates Its 75th Anniversary

Recently, Edminster, Hinshaw, Russ and Associates (EHRA) celebrated a major milestone in an unusual way. At the civil engineering company's 75th anniversary celebration in November, it unveiled a new logo that signifies a dramatic shift in direction. After 75 years as a family-owned enterprise, its leaders are selling the firm to the people who helped it grow — their employees.

This transition represents another chapter in the history of Houston's second-oldest, continuously operated engineering firm. The company got its start in 1936 when Truman Edminster Sr. opened a land surveying and civil engineering company near Rice University. Back then, the Bayou City was booming, and Edminster was eager to capitalize on this growth.

After Edminster died in 1948, his son Truman Jr. took over the company. Nine years later, Truman Edminster Sr.'s grandson Robert (Terry) Russ Jr. joined the firm. It continued to grow steadily until the 1960s, when the pace picked up significantly. Marvin Leggett and Bert Coats, who were developing dozens of large subdivisions in the city, began giving Edminster Engineering

a significant share of their business. Also prominent Houston architectural firm Neuhaus and Taylor hired the firm for projects not only in Houston, but also the Middle East.

To help accommodate this growth, Edminster Engineering merged with "friendly rival" Conrad Hinshaw's firm in 1969. Three years later, the company changed its name to Edminster, Hinshaw, Russ and Associates, Inc.

In 1989, EHRA moved to what is now Westchase District, purchasing and renovating a 16,000-square-foot vacant building on Westoffice Drive. The structure stood just east of the Sam Houston Tollway's proposed route, which opened just after the firm's move and provided easy access to land development projects on Houston's rapidly expanding perimeter.

"This segment of the county was going to be a major growth area," Terry Russ recalls.

Two more family members, Terry Russ's son Jim and Truman Edminster III, joined the company in the late 1990s. As Truman Edminster III recalls, "Terry said he wanted to put the 'family' back in the family business."

The firm continued to grow, and it also began to diversify. Today, it offers an array of services ranging from engineering design, surveying and land planning to landscape architecture and construction management. As Brandon Ring, senior graphics designer, explains, "We're a one-stop shop for land and site development."

Throughout the years, EHRA has played a significant role in Houston's growth, engineering such projects as the Sam Houston Racetrack and Willowbrook Mall as well as segments of the Sam Houston Tollway and Grand Parkway. It also helped start up dozens of municipal utility districts and develop multiple master-planned subdivisions and single-family communities,



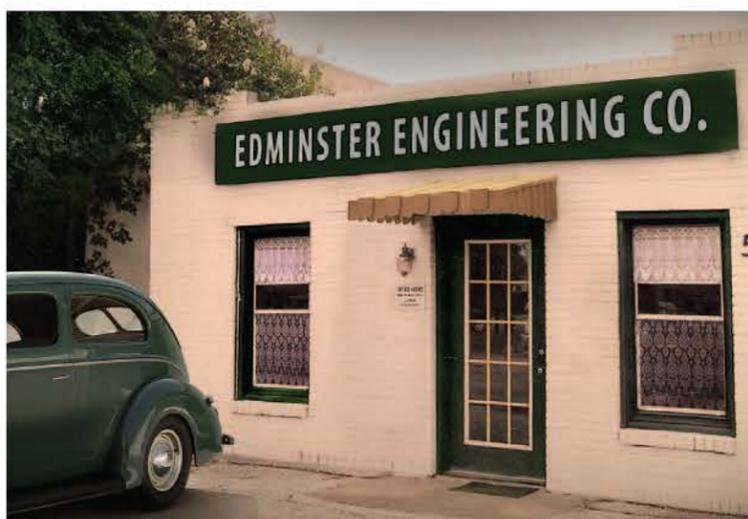
▲ EHRA's principals have made their company a one-stop shop for land and site development. Pictured: Jim Russ, Truman Edminster III, Conrad Hinshaw and Terry Russ Jr.

Including Lakeside Estates, Lakeside Forest, Frostwood, Williamsburg, Winchester Country and the Parkway.

"Our commitment to our community can be seen not only in the quality of our work, but also in our dedication to sustainable development," Jim Russ explains. Recently, it completed the first low-impact single-family subdivision to be approved by the City of Houston, and it's working with the Houston Land/Water Sustainability Forum to establish rules and regulations for low-impact development in Harris County. Its low-impact development subdivision design took top honors in its category in a competition sponsored by the Forum in 2010.

EHRA also was the first engineering company in Houston to implement online bidding for land development and construction projects. In addition to being more efficient and reducing errors, the process eliminates need for pre-printed documents and plans. As Jim Russ points out, "It saves trees."

At a reception on Nov. 10, customers, contractors, developers, friends and family members joined all the members of the firm in commemorating the anniversary of the business that was built by Truman Edminster Sr. and the three generations that followed him. With this rich heritage as its foundation, the firm looks forward to a successful future. **WT**



▲ EHRA has grown and diversified since it began as Edminster Engineering, a land surveying and civil engineering company near Rice University.

Red Roof Inn Aims for Blue-Ribbon Status

The difference between an underperforming business and one that is making money even in tough times is usually good management. Hanging out the "under new management" shingle is often the first step in turning a business around.

Mahendra Kapadia is the new owner and proprietor of Red Roof Inn Houston-Westchase. Previously owning a Best Western hotel in Clear Lake, he's a veteran of the hotel business.

When Kapadia purchased the Red Roof Inn in Westchase, he knew he had a lot of work to do to bring the property up to his standards. He needed to win back business travelers and leisure guests alike.

He promptly started upgrading the hotel and spared no expense. Sales/Marketing Manager Julie Webber says some locks needed replacing. Kapadia replaced them all. Ditto the air conditioning units and interior controls. Kapadia purchased new

patio furniture as well. He's become active in the Westchase community and plans to join area chambers of commerce.

Webber is offering discounted room rate options to leisure travelers who are AARP and AAA members. She's also networking with area businesses, making sure that travel decision-makers know that the hotel is under new management and that still more improvements are planned.

Westchase District Public Safety Director, Mark Hubenak, credits Kapadia with immediately changing the status of the Red Roof Inn and attracting a higher quality clientele. "Mahendra is the kind of owner who takes an active role in managing his property," says Hubenak. "His engagement with other owners in the area is also a plus."

For the salesman hop-scotching his way across the state one night at a time, to the family waiting to get moved into a new house, the "under new management" and "vacancy" signs are on

at the Red Roof Inn.

The hotel is located at 2960 W. Sam Houston Parkway S. For more information, visit www.redroof.com. **WT**



▲ The new owner spared no expense in upgrading this Westchase District hotel.