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SPECIAL SERIES ON...

## WHO'S WHO IN CONSTRUCTION

### Old buildings, young people favorite parts of business for Chan

It is the old and the young of the construction industry that Michael Chan likes, the tie between old buildings and young tradespeople.

One of the best parts of the business is "working with the beautiful, old buildings that we restore — the process, the (historical aspects) of the projects, and seeing build-



Chan

ings restored to their original grandeur," said Chan, owner and chief executive officer of The Durable Slate Co., 1050 N. Fourth St.

Chan's other favorite aspect is introducing young people to the construction trades. That, in fact, has been one of his professional goals. "I have done this many times," Chan said. "Many of our employees have college degrees in other areas of study, but decided to join us in construction."

Chan started in the business that way, as a laborer. "It was a good way to begin as there was much to be learned by viewing projects from that vantage point," he said. He recommended people coming up in the construction industry master their trade and learn the "business end of construction" before striking off on their own.

Once on his own, Chan has grown his company carefully.

Durable Slate's sales have grown more than 50 times in 10 years, "and all that growth was internally funded," he said. Further, Chan has structured the company in such a way as to avoid layoffs during the winters. "With 70 employees, Durable Slate has had no layoffs due to lack of work since its inception 11 years ago."

One of the pitfalls Chan has encountered during his years in business has been competing against unqualified or unscrupulous contractors, he said. Other problems have come when Chan has dealt with people "who fail to grasp that it takes a number of administrative personnel to make a viable concern in construction, quite aside from the number of field crews one employs."

Durable Slate has twice received the Model of Administrative Know-How Award from WISE International, a business association.

An increase in government regulation means it will be continually harder to make construction a profitable pursuit, Chan said.

To achieve profitability, promotion is vital, Chan said. "Many people in construction trades feel that word of mouth alone will be enough to make a business viable and continue its survival. This is rarely the case. A huge amount of promotion and marketing is usually required for even the best companies."