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## Builders Supply Co. has adapted to change



By Johnathan Ryan - Reporter

A hundred years ago, people would line Elm Street with their horses and wagons to get ice and coal from Lancaster Ice and Fuel Co. on French Street.

"It was a really active business," said Chauncey "Bubber" Gregory Jr.

It was the only ice plant in Lancaster County, and it provided ice and coal to Springs Cotton Mills during its early years.

Gregory's grandfather, William Thurlow, operated the fuel and ice company.

Gregory said his grandfather sensed a need for a company that would sell building supplies and build houses, so he started what would evolve into Builders Supply in 1908. William Gregory was then 53 and already a prominent local businessman.

"He was one of the original stockholders of Springs," Bubber Gregory said. "He was a very successful business man."

William Gregory served as vice president of Springs Mills, vice president of the L&C Railway, president of Farmers Bank and Trust Co. and was owner of Gregory Livestock Co., which had customers in South Carolina and St. Louis.

In 1913, he bought Moore Lumber and Manufacturing Co., which merged with the ice and fuel company, becoming Builders Supply.

In the early days, the company made bricks and lumber, and dried the lumber with a kiln. It also made cabinetry.

In the 1920s, the business turned to building a large number of Lancaster's new homes.

Bubber's father, Chauncey Gregory Sr., became president of the company in 1925.

But things came to a halt for Builders Supply with the onset of the Great Depression in 1929. The ice and coal business sustained the company and the Gregory family during that time. It was one of a handful of Lancaster businesses that survived.

Residential development picked up in the 1930s but then slowed again due to World War II. Building supplies and other commodities were scarce as they were used for the war effort.

The 1950s were a time of widespread residential growth, with the booming, post-war economy.

In 1955, Bubber Gregory, as company president, developed the county's first subdivision, Gregwood.

Builders Supply didn't stay in the subdivision business long.

"With developing, you usually have to put a lot of money in the front end and it takes lots of time to get it out. You don't see the profits until later," Bubber Gregory said.

But Gregwood played an important role in the development of the city with the S.C. Bypass 9 and the University of South Carolina at Lancaster blossoming nearby, Gregory said.

Today, Bubber Gregory, now 80, is chairman of the board of Builders Supply and his son, Greg Gregory, is president.

## **The future**

The Gregorys say the key to success of the company has been its ability to change with the times.

"Adapting to the market. The company has done that dozens of times through its 100 years,' Greg Gregory said. "Adaptability has been key to the company.

"The only constant in business is change," he added.

Today the business' main line of work is supplying residential developers in the Charlotte region with lumber, doors, windows, trusses and other building supplies. The retail wing of the business is much smaller today than during its heyday of the 1950s to the '70s as franchise competition set in.

The Gregorys say they want Builders Supply to be the go-to source for Charlotte-region developers looking for attentive, responsive service and high-quality materials.

The company serves eight of the top 25 residential developers in the Charlotte region, and has helped supply the construction of Sun City Carolina Lakes.

"We've been fortunate to be on the doorstep of a lot of the building," Greg Gregory said.

Last year, Builders Supply bought Metrolina Truss of Richburg.

"This truss business is our biggest undertaking in a while," Greg Gregory said. "It will take some time to digest that."

Between the building materials business and Metrolina, the Gregorys employ 75 people. The company is braving the downturn in new home construction and sales.

"It's deeper and more widespread than past ones," Bubber Gregory said.

The company is just tightening its belt. There was no "Straight A" event recently, which the company had become known for in its recognition of top students in the county with a hot dog party.

But the business goes on.

"It's been a family tradition," Greg Gregory said. "We certainly take pride in that longevity."

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