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UNDER ONE ROOF

Mike Beldon and son
have weathered ups
and downs.



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As winter approaches, Phil Hardberger will take a moment out of his mayoral campaign to put the Beldon family Christmas card on the mantel of his Monte Vista home.

Brad Beldon will be running to job sites in a Florida overrun by hurricanes and Mike Beldon will be wondering just when he'll get a chance to retire.

When, indeed?

At age 65, Mike Beldon finds himself the reluctant day-to-day chief of Beldon Roofing Co., a 58-year-old family business. He's also campaign treasurer of his friend's bid to be San Antonio's next mayor.

Beldon was one of Hardberger's earliest fans. Their conversations earlier this year inevitably would segue into Beldon's retirement from the Edwards Aquifer Authority, at which he was chairman for eight years.

"He'd always finish the conversations with a handshake and an 'I hope you run for mayor.' He was certainly one of the people who had an influence on me making my decision," said Hardberger, a former chief justice on the state's 4th Court of Appeals.

Hardberger knew Beldon Roofing before he ever met Beldon the man. The company repaired roofs on two of his houses, and Hardberger was impressed with how the company stood by its product.

They became acquainted at social events, and from there Beldon contributed to Hardberger's election to the appellate court.

"He told me once, 'I don't ever want you to find for me unless I'm right,'"



PHOTOS BY J. MICHAEL SHORT/SPECIAL TO THE EXPRESS-NEWS

Mike Beldon (left) and Brad Beldon are the father-and-son owners of Beldon Roofing, a business started by Mike's father after World War II.

Hardberger said. "And he meant it!"

It has been Hardberger's experience that although people often say such things, they show different feelings once a court's opinion is rendered.

"Some people, you find against them or their company, they think this is some sort of personal insult," Hardberger said. "Especially if they've made a contribution to you."

But when a workers' compensation decision went against Beldon at the 4th Court, there were no hard feelings.

"What you should expect from public servants has not gone out of date in the Beldon family," Hardberger said.

Beldon came up through the family business started by his parents in 1946. Morry Beldon, a graduate of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, found himself driving a truck during the Great Depression and later was on Gen. George S. Patton's staff.

His last Army assignment took him

from his native Boston to Fort Sam Houston. He and his wife, Ann, decided to stay and form a partnership with A.A. Shepherd in a company called AAA Roofing & Supply Co., which worked with roofers and homebuilders.

After nine years, the partners split in 1955 and the Beldons formed Beldon Roofing. Through the 1950s, the company focused on the residential market.

Mike Beldon, a 1960 economics graduate of Rice University, arrived at the family business at a time when it was expanding into the commercial sector.

"By 1980, residential roofing was only about 10 percent of our business," Beldon said.

Like many construction-related companies in the 1980s, Beldon Roofing was hit hard by the Texas real estate depression late in that decade.

"I would call it hanging on by our fin-

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Beldon Roofing has seen ups and downs

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gernails,” Beldon said. “That’s a period in my life where I didn’t sleep for about five years. We started to travel after the depression. We had to reinvent ourselves. When the new construction died, we started doing a lot more re-roofing.”

The company also was willing to do jobs much farther from its San Antonio base. One of its biggest contracts came from South Carolina, which suffered greatly at the hands of Hurricane Hugo in 1989. The \$7 billion damage it caused earned it the title of the costliest hurricane in U.S. history, but other hurricanes have since done worse.

Beldon also put its experience handling military contracts in San Antonio to use on bids in other cities. By the end of the 1990s, the company logo was a regular on construction sites across the Southeast.

Through acquisitions of other franchises, Beldon has also become the largest dealer in the nation for Englert Leafguard gutters, a unique rain gutter system that uses water tension to divert water into a curved-steel covered gutter.

The company’s annual revenues now gross about \$45 million. It’s one of the largest roofing companies in the nation.

Beldon, a former president of the National Roofing Contractors Association, noted that the average member has sales of about \$3 million a year.

Beldon Roofing celebrated its 50th anniversary in 1996 with an act of altruism.

“We were able to build a good business and become part of this community,” Beldon said. “We wanted to do something special. We went to Habitat for Humanity and said, ‘We’ll roof for free the next 50 houses you build.’ It took a couple of years to do that.”

Beldon stepped into the political arena at the request of his friend Jack Willome,



Beldon Roofing’s Ricardo Navarro works on a commercial job. The company started expanding into commercial work in the 1960s. By 1980, residential roofing made up only about 10 percent of its business, said owner Mike Beldon.

the former chief executive officer of Ray Ellison Homes, a company that was absorbed by KB Home. Willome was very interested in water issues. When the Edwards Underground Water District was dissolved, Willome urged Beldon to accept an appointment to the successor agency, the Edward Aquifer Authority.

“I think my major accomplishment was helping mold a group of people who didn’t know each other and didn’t like each other,” Beldon said. “They came into the room as enemies. That group became a pretty cohesive group. We were able to look at the region and say it doesn’t work for any of us if it doesn’t work for

all of us.”

Hardberger most admired Beldon’s leadership in Austin when the chairman stood up to Sen. Ken Armbrister, D-Victoria, who attacked Beldon for using the agency to enforce water quality.

“There is clearly a sentence in their enabling legislation that says they not only have the authority but the obligation,” Hardberger said. “Mike found himself on the receiving end of Armbrister’s wrath. I thought he stood up to him very manfully.

“Part of the measure of his being a public servant is being able to stand his own ground. I thought he showed some guts.”

Beldon retired from the EAA in December as the only chairman the agency had known. He had intended for his departure to be the first step in his retirement plans. His son, Brad, was ready to take the company reins.

Then Hurricane Charlie came, and Frances and Ivan and Jean.

Brad Beldon, 40 and married, went solo to central Florida and signed a six-month lease on an apartment.

“It’s just incredible. It’s mind-boggling,” the younger Beldon said. “I’m all over. I never know where I’m going to be the next day.”

Before the hurricanes, Beldon Roofing was well-entrenched in the Florida Panhandle, but the state represented only about 10 percent of the company’s business.

Beldon estimates Florida today makes up 30 percent of the company’s business, and its work commitments are statewide.

There are huge shortages of materials, especially roofing insulation.

“It is first-come, first served, and it goes to who is willing to pay more for it,” Beldon said. “They can’t manufacture product fast enough. People as far away as California can’t buy materials — they just don’t exist.”

Brad Beldon has been in the family business since age 12, so he’s seen the ups and downs.

Another slump came after 9-11, but Florida has given the company more business than it can handle.

Meanwhile, Mike Beldon stays by the phone at the main office, handling the day-to-day affairs when he professes he would rather be on the “strategic side.” A regular at Oak Hills Country Club, he’d also like to spend more time on the greens, here and elsewhere.

His eyes sparkle and he remarks wistfully that some of the best courses are in Santa Fe and Albuquerque, N.M.

His hands clasp and he takes an imaginary swing.