

Blown in by the Rain



Jason and Tim Kelley stand in the showroom of Texas Wood Mill Cabinets, Inc., a Hawkins-based business.

CONTRARY TO THE CATCHY TUNE THAT ADVERTISES IT NEVER rains there, California was plagued by a long rainy streak in the early 1970s. That unlikely weather event hobbled Tim Kelley's San Jose construction job and kept him from a paycheck. Luckily, he was invited to build some cabinets for a friend at a construction job site in Hawkins, Texas.

Kelley's accepting that job changed the trajectory of his life and steered him to his wife. It also gave rise to what is now a robust cabinet manufacturer, Texas Wood Mill Cabinets, Inc., one of the larger employers in Hawkins.

Soon after Tim arrived in Hawkins, he was introduced to Angie Mohler while visiting the former Ambassador College in Big Sandy. They hit it off, eventually married and opened an East Texas home construction and remodeling business.

Tim soon discovered that with so many friends in that same business, he didn't enjoy competing against them for work. "I knew they needed cabinets, so I just started concentrating on

building cabinets," Tim says. "Then I started picking up their work and that's how we really got started."

That first work was done out of the two-car garage of the couple's rental home. In 1982, he and his Angie invested in a 40-by-60-foot building, which allowed the business to expand. It also made it possible for them to modernize the business with industrial equipment and computer technology to produce more intricate raised panels and to meet the demands of the housing boom of the late 1980s and early 1990s. As they continued to grow, they added to the building. They finally ended up with an 10,000-square-foot facility that housed a showroom, offices, warehousing and manufacturing.

In 2010, Tim went into semiretirement, and Jason, one of his and Angie's two sons, took over as operations manager. Both Tim and Jason laugh when Tim says he's retired. In fact, over the past year, Tim has spent a great deal of time designing and building a brand new 20,800-square-foot state-of-the-art factory to meet



There are several workstations within the production facility to complete different phases of cabinet construction.

the growing demand. And Jason says Tim did much of the labor himself.

“The main purpose of the new building is for us to be able to invest in technology and some new machinery,” Jason says. They’d like to add more automation with computerized routers and CNC machinery that will cut materials to exacting standards. “We’ll benefit from organizational ability, process flow and the ability to build, stage and stock things, and economies of scale,” he adds.

While lean efficiencies are the main goal, they project that the new facility will also allow them to produce 25–30 percent more annually with the same number of workers. They expect to be settled into that building this month.

The company currently employs about 40 people, and they are always on the lookout for more qualified workers, including production, sales, office, design and facilities staff. Starting pay at TWMC ranges from minimum wage to \$15 an hour, depending on skill level, and they want potential workers to know there is room for employee growth.

“We have people within our company that have been with us for 25 years,” Jason says. And what does it take to work there? Beyond being able to speak English and have a tobacco- and illegal drug-free lifestyle, the Kelleys have a short list of require-



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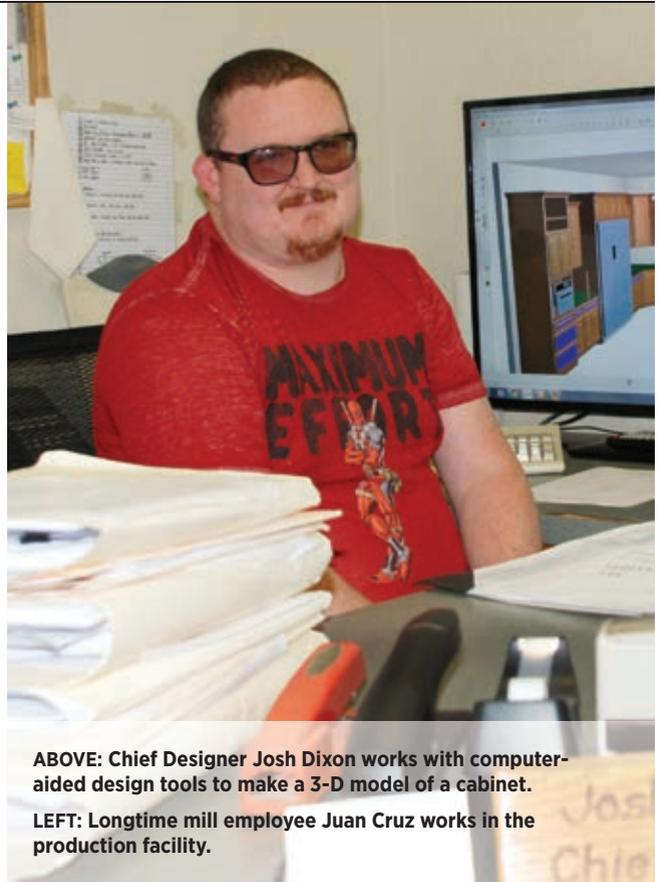
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MOBILE CONVENIENCE CENTER

Monday, First Methodist Church, *Van*
Tuesday, Family Dollar, *Mount Vernon*
Wednesday, City National Bank, *Hawkins*
Thursday, Brookshire’s, *Winnboro*
Friday, Economy Drug, *Grand Saline*



ABOVE: Chief Designer Josh Dixon works with computer-aided design tools to make a 3-D model of a cabinet.

LEFT: Longtime mill employee Juan Cruz works in the production facility.

ments for the workers they seek. “We only ask three things out of the people that we hire,” Jason says. “We want them to have a positive attitude, a sense of urgency and attention to detail. Then we will teach somebody anything else.” To that Tim adds, “We would rather take somebody that doesn’t know anything about cabinet work and we’ll train them if they have a good attitude and can legally drive a vehicle. They have to have a good driving record.”

Right now, 25–30 percent of the work at TWMC is commercial business. Jason says they are currently outfitting several assisted-living facilities in Texas, Colorado and Louisiana. Those large buildings encompass activity rooms, common areas and libraries that all need cabinetry. The largest percentage of TWMC’s work comes from local homebuilders. And new work is coming from areas near Houston as homeowners rebuild from Hurricane Harvey. About 10 percent of their business comes from individual local homeowners.

For commercial jobs and individuals, the bulk of TWMC’s work consists of designing, building, delivering and installing unstained or unpainted cabinetry. Buyers usually then work with their own painters and countertop suppliers to finish and top the work. But TWMC does offer a one-stop shopping service when the occasion warrants, such as for whole-house installations. They work with preferred partners to order and install the countertops and finish out the cabinets. “We don’t compete with the home center stores where you can buy a boxed cabinet,” Tim says. “Everything we do is custom.” To help with this service, they have samples of top materials and stains and finishes in their showroom.

There are a few things the Kelleys would like people to know about their business. First, Tim says, “That we are here!” Though TWMC has been in operation for over 35 years, he constantly hears that people are surprised to learn such a business has been in their midst for so long. He also notes that they are a faith-based business, saying, “We believe God helped us build it,” and that they apply the golden rule to how they treat their customers. They also want their customers to know they believe in personal accountability. “Designing and building cabinets is a multistep process,” Tim says. “We ask our customers to be accountable to us on what they agree to, and we will be accountable to them. It’s as simple as that.”

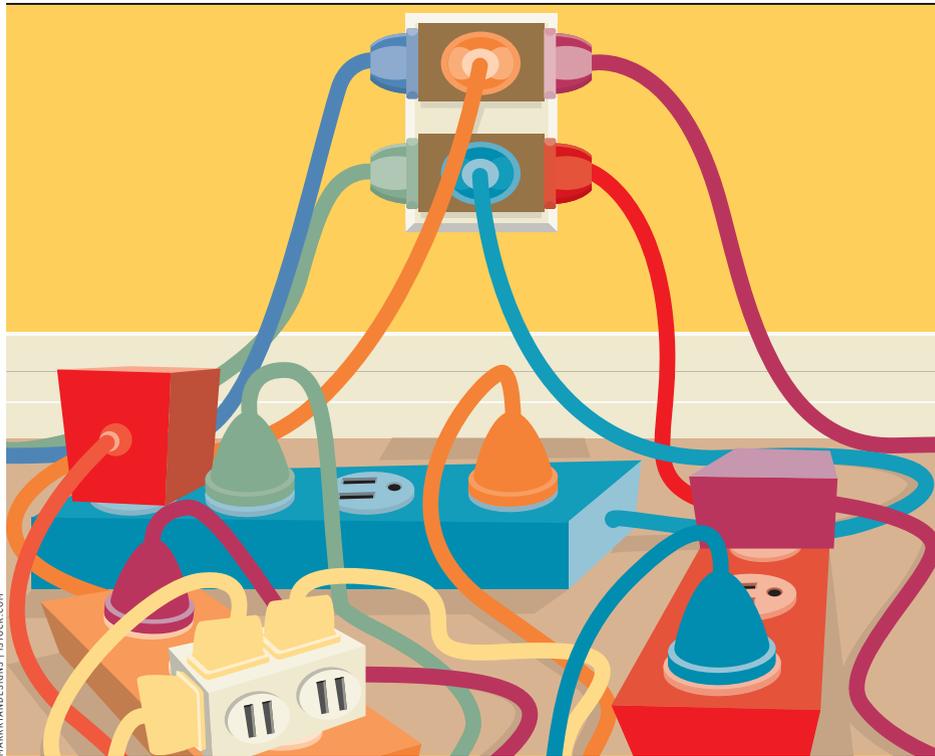
Despite the growth of their company and family, Angie and Tim have lived in the same house in Hawkins where they raised their two sons, Jason and Jeremy, since 1982. Jason and his wife, Christle, have five children. Jeremy, who works in Tyler, and his wife, Crystal, have two children.

Texas Wood Mill Cabinets, Inc. is a member of Wood County Electric Cooperative.

Texas Wood Mill Cabinets, Inc.

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Unlike in California of so long ago, rain or sunshine, work at TWMC goes from 7 a.m. to 4 p.m., Monday–Thursday and until noon on Friday. Customers can drop by, but an appointment will ensure a sales representative is available.



Wrapping Up the Holidays

AFTER A HOLIDAY SEASON FILLED WITH friends, family and fun, the tinsel is being unstrung and the decorations put away. Here are some post-holiday tips to help you stay safe for another season:

- ▶ Holiday decorations are meant for temporary use. Leaving your decorations up for extended periods leaves wires unnecessarily exposed to the elements, which can decrease a product's shelf life and increase the risk of electrical hazards.
- ▶ With time, Christmas trees continue to dry out, making them increasingly flammable. Trees decorated with holiday lights pose an increased risk because they're in direct contact with an electrical source. Check with your community to find a recycling program through which you may dispose of your tree early in the new year.
- ▶ Always unplug decorations by using the plug or other gripping area. Pulling on the cord could damage the wire and present a shock or fire hazard.
- ▶ As you take down holiday lights, inspect the wiring and discard any that have cracked, frayed or otherwise damaged wire insulation.
- ▶ Label and store indoor decorations separate from those intended for outdoor use.
- ▶ Store electrical decorations in a dry area that is not accessible to children or pets.

Resolve To Save Energy in 2018

SAVING ENERGY—AND MONEY—SHOULD BE ON EVERYONE'S RESOLUTION LIST. HERE are nine quick tips to help you get started in 2018.

- 1. Replace your lightbulbs.** Most people have switched from traditional incandescent bulbs by now, but in case you're still on the fence: An \$8 LED lasts up to 25 times longer and costs only \$30 to operate over that period.
- 2. Beef up the insulation in your attic.** Attics can be sources of heat loss in the winter and heat gain in the summer. Payback varies by region, but it's usually within two years, and your home's comfort will show a difference.
- 3. Install programmable thermostats.** Up to 20 percent of the average home's yearly energy bill goes toward heating and cooling. Programmable thermostats save money by adjusting the temperature during unoccupied hours.
- 4. Maintain your HVAC system.** Heating and cooling system equipment runs best when maintained. Change your filters on a regular basis and have equipment serviced annually to make sure it's running efficiently.
- 5. Unplug.** Check around the house to see if devices are unnecessarily plugged in. Cellphones, chargers, TVs, entertainment systems, computers and appliances still draw power when not in use.
- 6. Weatherize.** Weatherizing your home means sealing against airflow around doors, windows and places where pipes enter the home.
- 7. Conduct your own energy audit.** Do you really need two refrigerators? Is there a fish tank with no fish? Is your house so hot in the winter that you need to wear a Hawaiian shirt? Walk around your house to check for—and eliminate—wasteful energy loads.
- 8. Replace your single-pane windows.** Upgrading to more energy-efficient windows can help control temperature and air infiltration in your home. It can be costly, but payback can take just a few years.
- 9. Upgrade your appliances.** Energy Star-rated appliances mean more energy efficiency and can save you hundreds of dollars over their life span.

