

Sponsor Spotlight



Written by MRE resident
Russ Kilgore

CAN'T STAY COOL? CALL WARNKY!

A Family Business with a Commission-Free Philosophy

SUZANNE WARNKY IS a maverick. I suspect it's something she's been working on since she was a kid. Her parents, Jean and Richard Warnky, taught her the realities of life and Suzanne is no shrinking violet. But when she lost her Dad, Richard in the middle of expanding his business, she had to step up and take over everything. She may not have been ready for it, but Richard had been grooming her for years. However, he hadn't yet embraced technology when he died. "Dad was a pack rat," Suzanne said, "but an organized one." Connecting all the business-dots was difficult, given that her Father saved everything business wise, but that everything was still on paper. A lot of his company was "in his head," including to some extent his vision for the future of the company. Richard Warnky died in a tragic accident in 2007 while he was building their



Richard teaching Suzanne at an early age



current headquarters on Bayshore Road in North Fort Myers.

"Dad's office was out of his home and his shop was a pole barn he rented in the industrial area," Suzanne explained, "and he had no bookkeeping computer systems- or anything computerized for that matter. He figured he was 10 years from retirement, so he wasn't trying to grow it really and his methods worked fine for him."

Jean and Richard Warnky moved from St. Louis to Southwest Florida when Suzanne was 5 years old. "We had a vacation home in Cape Coral and winters up north were tough," she said. "We moved down here so Dad could stop shoveling snow." A familiar story for many former northerners.

Suzanne was going to school at Florida Gulf Coast University (FGCU) when Richard fell from the roof of the building during construction. He was doing much of the work himself. When he died, Suzanne took over. By then, she already had a good bit of experience in the construction industry, but had to get licensed to finish her dad's building. And it wasn't easy.

"Lots of people tried to take advantage of me when we were vulnerable," she said. "One vendor Dad used tried to charge me a lot more than he agreed to charge my dad."



They thought they could..."—well, you get the picture. But that wasn't going to happen. She said, "My dad taught me everything I needed to know. We had a really good relationship. We talked several times each day and had lunch together often."

Suzanne took and passed the test for her general contractor license, and learned to build a commer-



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cial building from the plans. She found errors in the plans, fixed things with the engineers and kept things on track.

The building opened on Suzanne's birthday, September 12, 2009, and she's been building her late father's business out of there ever since. In the years leading up, HVAC systems went from analogue to digital and computerized office systems became the norm.

Suzanne kind of cringed and said, "It was crazy the first year. I got my HVAC license—certified AC systems and repair—and I totally changed up the way we did business. We modernized. I put everything in data bases and put GPS in the trucks. The technology for HVAC systems is constantly evolving and there can be compatibility issues for older equipment and systems. A lot of times techs aren't qualified because they can't, or don't, stay up to date with their training."

Suzanne rode in a service truck and went to every install she could. "I couldn't direct a crew if I didn't know what everybody was doing. I like trouble shooting and solving a problem and this business gives me the challenges I need and the 'newness' of the evolving industry keeps everything fresh for me."

Richard Warnky may not have been thinking "growth," but Suzanne sure was. "We quintupled business in the first ten years," she explained, "and it takes good people to do





it. Since it's so hard to hire good people, you try hard to keep them." For Warnky, that means good wages and benefits.

Suzanne told me that a lot of AC-repair companies operate on commission. Some techs even work at 100 percent commission. "So, if they don't 'sell' anything when they go on a call,"

she said, "they don't make any money. If they need money for their family, they may not be as honest with you as they should."

Warnky is different. "We don't pay commission," she said, "so our techs aren't under that kind of pressure. My pricing is fair but I'm not the cheapest. I can't do that and provide good service. You can be fast, good and cheap but you can't be all three at the same time."

If you call Warnky, the service charge covers trip-time, diagnostics and 15 minutes of labor toward a repair, while many companies will only knock on your door for the service call fee; diagnostics and labor are typically additional fees. "We do everything in our power to resolve any issue and make things right for our customers. We provide them with their options rather than pressuring them into replacement like some companies," Suzanne said. "For good companies, it's critical that you keep your good reputation up front on-line. You can't afford bad reviews. We try hard to avoid that by dealing with the customers every step of the process." She told me Warnky also has longer labor warranties and offers extended warranties and all kind of finance options.

"Our approach is to do what's best for the customers individual situation," Suzanne said. "Repair vs replace, and everything in between. I'm very proud of our no-commission approach. I would rather be able to sleep at night." So, it figures if Suzanne Warnky sleeps well, her customers can too—and do so comfortably!



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