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MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 22, 2008

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## On the job

**William D. Saunders**  
Owner,  
Saunders and Sons roofing company

Age: 40  
Town of residence: Southbridge  
Native of: Braintree  
Family: Married with twin sons  
Time in job: 20 years

### What do you do?

"I do everything. I go out and look at the job and give estimates. I order all the material; I order the Dumpster. I'm the foreman. We come in and take your roof off, and put the new one on. I'm actually on the roof doing the shingling. We do slate, copper, rubber, all kinds of roofing. I employ three people. ... You have to deal with customers. My phone's on all the time. It's customer relations."

### How did you get into this field?

"I was on the roof with my father when I was younger. He was a roofer. Both of my brothers are roofers. It runs in the family. I love the work. At the end of the day you're tired and you know you earned your money. You feel good about what you've done at the end of the day. I've been a roofer for 20 years and started my company five years ago."

### Has the slow economy or declining housing market had much of an impact on the roofing business?

"When you need a roof, you need a roof. People are pretty much going to get the money. If it's an emergency, you can pay for it with a credit card. They can charge it. That works out for both of us. I've had about the same number of jobs as last year. We do 50 to 60 roofs a year."

### Is roofing a dangerous job?

"Absolutely. You can walk out the door and not come back. My father lost an eye. My brother broke his back. I had heatstroke two months ago. The ambulance had to come get me. When it's 98 degrees on the ground, it's another 20 degrees hotter up on a roof. ... All it takes is a second. One mistake, step on a hose or something, and you're going off. When there's frost on the roof, it's easy to slide off. You can fall through a roof. A couple of years ago I fell 10 feet off a ladder and broke both of my ankles."

### Besides the heat, are there conditions that are challenging?

"The snow can be challenging. We just take the snow off with the (old) roof. If there's frost up there, we'll put a ladder up to the peak, then walk along the peak, so if you slip, you have the peak between your legs instead of sliding off one side. You start from the top and take the frosty shingles off as you work your way down. There's inherent risk anytime you go to work."

### Are there any things you won't do?

"I won't do pitch roofs anymore. They're flat roofs that are covered with rubber. When you pull them up there's fumes that get in your eyes. There's something in there that makes you itch like crazy. Your eyes swell up and you're not able to see. I don't do repairs. You can spend a lot of time finding a leak, and you still may not find it. Where you see water coming into the



T&G Staff/DAN GOULD

It runs in Williams D. Saunders' family: His father was a roofer; both of his brothers are roofers.

house probably isn't where the leak is.

### What is the best part of your job?

"As the owner, I can work three days a week if I want to, and spend the rest of the week with my family. Me and my guys, sometimes we'll put in three 16-hour days, Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, and take Thursday and Friday off. I can spend that with my boys. That means more than anything."

### What's the worst part?

"The headaches of owning a small business. My phone's on from 5 a.m. till 8 p.m. If there's a problem, you have to go out and deal with it. You have to learn how to work with the customer and be nice about it. Some days you've been there for 16 hours, and the customer wants you to go back up on the roof for something. I don't want to go back up. But if you do that, you'll get referred for other jobs."

### What have you learned from this job?

"Patience. Customer relations. How to run a business and to run a crew the right way. People really trust you when you do that roof. It's no joke. If you get a leak, it can ruin the ceiling, the furniture or your computer. Then you have to call the insurance company."

Compiled by: Business reporter Martin Luttrell

To be featured in or to suggest a job profile, send information to Bob Kievra, Telegram & Gazette, Box 15012, Worcester, MA 01615-0012, or send an e-mail to [rkievra@telegram.com](mailto:rkievra@telegram.com).