

WEB, GPS TRANSFORM ROOFING

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LEXINGTON -- After 20 years in the computer software business, Bill Hope admits he didn't know much about roofing when he bought Alumni Roofing Co. Inc. in 2004.

But he knew technology.

"I had absolutely no experience in roofing," Hope said, "but I felt there was a real need to bring information technology to building owners."

Hope, who owns the business at 2830 U.S. 42 South with wife Karen, has introduced Global Positioning System, Internet-based roof surveys and portable infrared imagers to his business.

By combining a mobile GPS sensor and a hand-held computer, Alumni Roofing can create a comprehensive survey. The data is stored on a Web site for easy access.

"They don't have to come here to walk on the roof," Hope said.

The feature comes in handy for owners who don't live in the area. Alumni Roofing did a recent local job for an owner based in Pittsburgh who didn't have to leave the state to see progress on the project. Alumni Roofing can use the GPS scanner to determine dimensions, saving on manpower.

"It's no different than using a map and a tape measure," Hope said.

The portable infrared imagers might be even more cutting edge. Alumni Roofing uses them to locate roof leaks and determine the quantity and location of wet insulation. Such scanning, which measures the difference in temperature, is done at night.

"Insulation holds water. Water holds heat during the day," Hope said. "We can pick up where the water is."

An infrared imager revealed a pin-hole leak at Crestline High School in one of Alumni Roofing's first jobs. Water was entering the building approximately 30 feet from the location of the tiny leak.

Since buying the business from the previous owner, who went to Haiti to do missionary work, Hope has expanded Alumni Roofing to 16 employees during the summer. Todd Lindeman is the general manager.

Lindeman is a veteran of the roofing industry. He has worked for three companies in the past 13 years. Lindeman admits he was a bit skeptical of Hope's approach.

"I was not sure this was going to work. I had never seen anything like this," he said. "It's amazing how much (technology has helped). It definitely sets us apart."

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