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# King of His Craft

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By Matt Alderton

Chris King always wanted to be a police officer. But when he finally became a cadet, he ultimately decided he'd rather design and build than serve and protect. So, he left the police force to pursue a career in construction.

"When you're in construction, you see the progress you're making. People can see the work that you do," says King, 47, owner of King Construction in Mt. Albert, Ontario. "They can walk up and say, 'Wow, you do great work. That looks beautiful. Can I have your card?' I thoroughly enjoy that."

King's enjoyment appears to be contagious-as of March 2012, he was booked until September, and as of September, he was booked through March 2013.

"This year has been unbelievable," says King, a one-man operation doing everything from shingling, framing, insulation and drywall installation to concrete work, ceramic tile, hardwood floors and window replacement. "My business has just snowballed."

## Framing His Future

King started his construction career at 19, while he was still enrolled in the police academy. "I was in the middle of going to college, and I needed some spare money," he recalls. "So, I started working for a friend."

He started as a subcontractor framing new houses in subdivisions, and then moved on to work for a custom homebuilder, who taught him other skills such as drywall installation. After that, he worked for his brother-in-law, a painter, before eventually taking a hiatus from construction at the age of 26.

"When the recession hit in 1991, I got out of construction because I was only working two or three days a week and had a young family to support," says King, a father of two, who spent the next 13 years working as a security officer. He eventually went back to construction full-time in 2004. But when his employer hit a dry spell, he decided to start his own business.

"[It] was quite scary, because I'd been out of the business for 13 years and lost a lot of my clients and contacts," King says. "I was scared to death to start my own business."

## From Bathrooms to Basements

King's fears proved unfounded. Although work initially was hard to come by, he established a good reputation among homeowners, which quickly turned into repeat business and referrals.

"I got to the point I'm at now because one of my neighbors had a client she did some painting and cleaning for," King recalls. "She wanted the ceilings in two bathrooms re-drywalled. That little \$400 job turned out to be \$50,000, just from that one family alone. I've done almost every room in their house."

A business that began with two bathroom ceilings now encompasses virtually every room in the home. But out of all the rooms King works on, his favorite is the basement. "I just completed a basement last month that's one of the nicest [basements] I've ever seen. It had a lot of custom cabinetry that was built to spec and drilled into the walls. That had to have been one of the most fun jobs I've been on in a while," King says.

## 'A Great Group of People'

Because King doesn't have a crew, he needs partners who share his appreciation for quality. He found those partners five years ago, when he began shopping at the Lowe's store in East Gwillimbury, Ontario.

"I went into Lowe's when it was built and saw they had these little buttons for assistance; when you push them, someone comes running. I thought that was great," King says.

He's been a loyal customer ever since. In the five years he's been shopping at Lowe's, a lot of people have come running to help King. One of them is Commercial Sales Specialist Amanda "Mandy" Waugh.

"I was introduced to Chris King a few years ago," Waugh recalls. "He wanted a go-to person. I told him, 'I don't know a million and one things about a million and one products, but I'll find you the right person who does.' He respected that."

King began shopping in the millwork department, but now, he shops in every department throughout the store. "It's a great group of people," King says of the Lowe's staff. "Mandy, in particular, has a special place in my heart. We have a great rapport."

In fact, King has a special relationship with many Lowe's employees: Not only is he their customer, but many of them are also his clients, as several employees have personally hired him to do work in their homes. "The fact that I sell to him, help him with his projects and even have him in my own home says a lot about his character," Waugh says.

The only thing King likes better than the store's friendly staff is the Lowe's Volume Pricing Program (VPP), which gives contractors bulk discounts on specific products. "When I use VPP, I can save \$1,500 to \$2,000 easily," says King, who passes all the savings on to his customers. For example, he recently completed a specialty walkway for one homeowner that required 400 bags of concrete and 100 bottles of dye. "I saved \$500 on the concrete, plus \$400 on the coloring."

The savings he passes on to customers mean that King is likely to be busy for years to come-more years, probably, than he'd like to admit. "I like working. If I'm sitting at home, I'll be bored to tears," he says. "So, although I want to retire, I think I'll probably just keep plugging away."

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