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**Above:** Family-run RB Scott Co. is located at 1011 Short Street in Eau Claire. Pictured, from left, are Scott Mickelson; Katie Murphy; John Mickelson, president and sales manager; Nancy Mickelson, vice president; and founders Norma and Ralph Scott. Siblings Scott Mickelson and Murphy, respectively, work in sales and marketing for the business. **Below:** GreyHawk Design, an RB Scott Co. spinoff, was formed in 2008. The Mickelsons — from left, children Katie Murphy and Scott, and parents Nancy and John — run the business.

Staff photos by Steve Kinderman

## Ability to adapt lifts family-run company

By Liam Marlaire  
Leader-Telegram staff

**R**B Scott Co. refused to be a victim of the Great Recession.

Declines in residential and commercial develop-

ment, in addition to lower transportation funding, curbed demand for concrete, asphalt, crushed stone, and sand and gravel. The Eau Claire-based company is an aggregate and recycling process equipment and wear parts dealership. Clients include concrete companies and paving contractors.

RB Scott had too much inventory, devalued used equipment and sluggish sales. The company's response

in the midst of the downturn was to form another company — GreyHawk Design and Fabrication. The division creates custom-designed stationary and portable plants for sand and aggregate processing applications.

### History

**1976:** Ralph Scott and his wife, Norma, start RB Scott Co. out of their Third Ward home. It was profitable within 4½ months.

**1979:** John Mickelson joins the company as a salesman.

**1993:** Mickelson and his wife, Nancy, who also is the daughter of Ralph and Norma, purchase the business. It has six employees and a 600-square-foot office.

**1997:** First phase of its current location at 1011 Short Street is built.

**1998:** First service employee hired. The company now has four service trucks and six service employees.

**2000:** Additional warehouse and storage added.

**2004:** Space leased to open wire screen cloth shear and press brake operation.

**2006:** Heavy equipment shop with 20-ton overhead bridge crane built.

The move increased RB Scott's customer base and provided another revenue stream. It also helped the company earn the Eau Claire Area Chamber of Commerce's Small Business of the Year award for firms with 25 or fewer employees. Applied Data Consultants earned the award among businesses with larger staffs.

"Both companies are locally owned and overcame some



difficult situations, which made them better companies and stronger today," said Bob McCoy, chamber president and CEO.

GreyHawk started with a single computer-aided design engineer and took a year to design its first portable crusher and screen plant. It has now shipped nearly 50 units to locations as far away as South Africa. It also has expanded to two CAD engineers and a lead engineer.

■ **The 2014 Small Business of the Year Breakfast is 7:30 to 8:30 a.m. Wednesday at the Clarion Hotel, 2703 Craig Road. The cost is \$20. Visit [eauclairechamber.org](http://eauclairechamber.org) or call 715-834-1204 to register or for more information.**

The booming frac sand industry in Wisconsin also boosted business for RB Scott. Much of the equipment when it began came in from Texas, said John Mickelson, president and sales manager. RB Scott entered the market with an order from EOG Resources in Chippewa

Falls, supplying a custom GreyHawk screen and crusher tower and a conveyor system.

RB Scott also sells a product, a recessed filter press, that extracts water from remaining clay and silt in the washing water used at wet plants and returns clear water to the

process. The process helps the businesses meet certain regulations, and the resulting dried filter cake is used in the reclamation of sites.

RB Scott currently is involved in a process plant in Blair.

"We had to claw our way into the business," Mickelson said of frac sand. "Now we have outstanding relationships with these companies."

RB Scott has invested in its parts/consumable business as well, ensuring revenue even during tepid economic climates. Its service department, made up of trucks, technicians and an on-site shop, also grew.

"Customers were asking for these things," Mickelson said. "In response to the marketplace, we began to grow, slowly but steadily."

Mickelson is quick to credit his employees, which now number 23, for the company's adaptability and success. His wife and the company's vice president, Nancy Mickelson, said the first district manager hired still works for the business, for which turnover is a relatively foreign concept.

"They represent our interests," said John Mickelson, "the way we want to do business every day." "You can't find a better company to work for," said Ralph Scott, who founded the company in 1976 with his wife, Norma. Nancy Mickelson is their daughter.

RB Scott has exclusive distribution agreements with some companies, a few of which were sealed with a handshake in RB Scott's formative years. John Mickelson said the company's founders did the "heavy lifting" by establishing "great brands and trusting relationships with customers."

Ralph Scott said he left the business in good hands. Much of its busi-

ness is in the Upper Midwest but it does reach as far as Colorado.

"It's a far cry from the modest start we had," Ralph said. "It's grown into areas we never would have thought of."

It also appears the business will remain in the family. John and Nancy's daughter, Katie Murphy, a new mom who lives in Washington, D.C., handles marketing duties. She also streamlined company documents such as brochures into an app for the sales staff, all of whom are armed with iPads.

Their son, Scott, is in sales and is a liaison for the sand plants. Both siblings graduated from Memorial High School and earned secondary degrees outside the state before rejoining RB Scott.

Responsibilities vary at RB Scott, a company at which jeans are acceptable business attire but technical expertise in a number of areas is required. John, who has kept a bedside notebook to jot down new ideas, broke the business down into three core areas: employees, customers and vendors.

"It's getting all three to work together," he said. "We just love doing it every day."

Hence a common phrase at the company concerning all three categories: "It's about getting them in the family and keeping them there."

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