

From 'Shack dragger' to entrepreneur

Morrell White Housemoving

For more than four decades, Morrell White of Rainsville, Alabama, about 100 miles northeast of Birmingham, has been moving houses. In fact, he began while he was still a student in high school, which got him in hot water on occasions.

His father, Lloyd White, and an uncle Floyd White, were his teachers. "They were what you called 'shack draggers' back then," said Morrell.

White recalled with a bit of humor how that while a student at Plainview High School, his dad and uncle were preparing to move one of the school's buildings when a teacher, "Mr. Kirk," came into White's classroom and said to him: "You're not gonna learn anything anyway, you might as well go work."

Later, another teacher, Kenneth Brown, told of looking out a classroom window and seeing White move a house down the highway. What made it so funny, he recalled, was that three Beta Club (honor society) class members were also helping with the move.

White said that although he graduated from high school, he did not do well and did not attend college; however, he acknowledged, it did provide the drive to succeed because he didn't have an education to fall back on. "Education would have helped because without it I've had to work a lot harder to do everything," he said.

And work he has, starting his own business at age 19 with a 933 Caterpillar loader. Basically, his father's work was hauling dirt, clearing land, building fish ponds. Young White began moving small cribs, barns, "and odd stuff," he said. As a result, he began making a little money; "didn't mean too," he chuckled. Then he began moving houses.

In the meantime, both his father and uncle have died, but his wife, Jo, has stepped in as bookkeeper. His two sons worked with him while they were growing up, but are no longer in the business.

The eldest son, Jeff, is in the house moving business but with M.T. Kirkpatrick in Warrior, Alabama. Another son, Eric is employed with Bell South Telephone company and their daughter, Tammy, is a school teacher.

Today, some 42 years later, Morrell White Housemoving is doing well. Eight acres in railyard,



Morrell and Jo White in front of their home in Rainsville, Alabama

"more equipment than I need," and 41 sets of running steel, he said. Last year, he put antifreeze in 52 pieces of equipment.

It takes only a minute to detect that White's favorite part of the house moving business is operating the equipment. "I'd rather mow grass than fish," he once told an inquirer. "Whatever cranks a man's tractor" is his philosophy toward life.

White conceded, however, that the hardest thing about moving a house "is toting those blocks and timers and being your own engineer, foreman, superintendent and sales person. And the second hardest is working for the public."

He admitted, however, that he doesn't have to do a lot of things he does, "but I just don't know the difference," he laughed.

A major hurdle for the business today is getting and keeping adequate labor, according to White. In fact, he said at the moment he didn't have even one crew, which most of the time consists of himself and two to three other workers.

That and multiple permits, insurance and regulations are a challenge. As a result, he stays within

a 75-mile radius of his business, and within the county if at all possible.

"The Department of Transportation gets involved if you cross the county line," he said. "Then you have to engage a state trooper, escorts, etc. Plus, you have to buy a license for every little town you go through," he said.

Despite the difficulties, business is good, according to White, noting that...

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