

## under 40

BY SUE MARQUETTE POREMBA

## A man in the arena

As you talk with Craig Covell, it quickly becomes clear that sports are an important part of his life. Throughout his education he participated in football and wrestling. He pursued records and titles during his collegiate wrestling career at Wilkes University in Wilkes-Barre, Pa. Sports enhanced the work ethic Covell needed to succeed.

"Many of the attributes you apply in the sports arena give you a foundation to be successful if applied in the world of business," he says. Putting forward the best effort possible, striving for a better performance, and working as a team are among the reasons why Everlast Roofing has become a leader within the post-frame building industry.

The 39-year-old Sinking Spring, Pa., resident didn't plan on a business career in manufacturing when he went to college. Studying courses in psychology and sociology, Covell prepared for a future as a teacher and coach. However, life doesn't always go as planned. In 1988, rather than heading into the classroom Covell accepted a job working in the metal roofing industry. As the years flew by, his knowledge exploded and he discovered his passion. Metal roofing and the types of relationships developed in the industry became not only Covell's job but also his way of life.

As he built relationships within the metal roofing circle, Covell often found himself saying, "If I had my own company, I would do this, this, and this differently." One day, he was caught by surprise when someone said, "Well, let's do it." In August 1996, Covell got his opportunity to do things differently when he co-founded Everlast Roofing.



Craig Covell (left) co-founded Everlast Roofing 10 years ago, and the company has become a leader in the metal panel market serving the post-frame building industry. EVERLAST PHOTOS

The trend in the industry at that time was to provide the lowest-priced product. Top quality was secondary. Covell has always believed that quality should come first, even if it meant his product would cost more than that of many of his competitors. By giving his customers a top-quality product and instituting a state-of-the-art research and development division, an innovative and successful business was born.

Covell's dream continues to grow and has expanded to include three manufacturing facilities, located in Pennsylvania, Indiana, and Maine.



about our quality, and we care about each other."

Covell does whatever he can to help his employees love what they do. "Part of my job is to make sure the right person is in the right job," he says. "If you don't like what you are doing, I'll help you find a job you love, as long as you help yourself by putting in the effort." For example, he remembers an employee who worked on the manufacturing side of the business. He was very frustrated, unhappy, and finding it hard to be successful. Rather than leaving the company, the employee moved to Everlast's sales department. "He's now our top salesperson," says Covell.

Covell's work experience has given him the expertise to be a hands-on president. Every job within the company has had his mark on it — literally. He has done every job within the company. As Everlast has grown, he has trained employees and relinquished tasks he originally handled himself to ensure that his focus could continue to be a vision for the future. "I'm a firm believer that if you are going to teach someone anything, you better know how to do it yourself," Covell says. Today, one of his greatest challenges is keeping his finger on the pulse of the



A football player and wrestler in his younger days, Covell originally planned on a career in teaching and coaching. He still coaches youth football and wrestling in his home area of Sinking Spring, Pa., and applies lessons learned in sports to his day-to-day life.

This growth can only be explained, Covell says, "Because we have both a very loyal customer base and 100 employees who believe in providing our clients what they want — quality."

When it comes to talking about his employees, Covell is convinced that if you love what you are doing, it shows. "A customer needs to know that you can be trusted, your product can be trusted," says Covell. "The best way to demonstrate trust is through understanding quality and service. Everlast is who we are because our employees care about our customers, we care

company as it continues to grow in locations hundreds of miles apart.

The Everlast Roofing mission is to create quality metal roofing and siding products and to ensure accuracy, product improvement, and customer satisfaction. To do that, the company developed and markets innovative techniques such as heat-forming and the Ultimate G100 Process. These days, Covell continues to spend a third of his time on research and development so Everlast quality — both in products and services — stays ahead of competitors.

"Builders want a quality product," says Covell, "not just a good warranty." Initially, customers were skeptical of the way Everlast promoted its products. However, partnering with vendors such as U.S. Steel, Valspar, Akzo Nobel, and others has been vital to Everlast's success. By listening to what customers want and helping them achieve their business goals, Covell has built a business where customers partner with Everlast.

Covell also believes in the importance of partnering with and supporting the community. He personally gives back to the youth in Sinking Spring and in neighboring towns by coaching youth wrestling and football. Everlast employees are also encouraged to spend time volunteering. Organizations such as Big Brothers Big Sisters, Muscular Dystrophy Association, youth basketball, high school theater productions, Hurricane Katrina relief, and the Relay for Life have all been beneficiaries of Everlast's philanthropy.

Talking to Covell, it is obvious that he loves what he does for a living. "The industry is full of good people," he says. "It's rewarding to look at a building and know that it's your 'skin.' I love metal roofing. I talk about it all the time." It's also about working in a community in which the post-frame industry encompasses a large portion of the culture. "You interact with character-driven individuals who appreciate hard work and quality," he says. "It is a sincere industry." Covell fits into this culture and it is where he builds his best



Covell inspects paint performance on metal panels at a test fence. He spends about one-third of his time on research and development.

relationships.

There are frustrations. Despite the increasing number of companies that, like Everlast Roofing, value high quality over low prices, there are still companies that try to cut corners, which can hurt the reputation of the overall industry. And, of course, like any business where fuel, raw material, and labor costs are a factor, the economy often sets the tone for some aspects of the business.

Still, the future is bright for Craig Covell and Everlast Roofing, in part because of the growing credibility of post-frame construction. "When I came into the business," Covell says, "we found a niche in providing top-quality products. We've proved that our customers want the same thing. We'll never be satisfied and will continue to develop innovative and exciting ways to enhance our products and services."

This is the type of focus learned in sports and applied to develop a successful business. ■