

# Fence Builders links quality, reliability after 60 years in business

By Fran Daniel Winston-Salem Journal | Posted: Saturday, December 26, 2015 8:45 pm



## Fence

A recently installed gate by Fence Builders Incorporated at Legacy Saddlebreds on Friday, December 11, 2015 in Winston-Salem, N.C. (Winston-Salem Journal, Andrew Dye) 20151227w\_biz\_fence

In some respects, Fence Builders Inc. has been a well kept secret in Winston-Salem since it was founded in 1955 by brothers John and Mark Shelton.

“A lot of people don’t know we’re here in Winston-Salem,” said current owner Steve Shelton, Mark Shelton’s son.

Fence Builders’ administrative offices, fabrication shops, equipment yard and various storage buildings sit on about six acres on Old Salisbury Road, not far from Flow Honda on Peters Creek Parkway. The company butts up to Interstate 40 with operations on both sides of Old Salisbury Road.

But people that do business with the 60-year-old Fence Builders are quite familiar with its location and have watched the company over the years transform from a maker of just chain link fence into a full contractor that also has a division called Perimeter Access Control Technologies, known as PACT. The company offers a variety of products, including wood, vinyl, chain link and ornamental fencing, as well as gates and access control systems for homes and businesses.

Some of the company's work includes BB&T Ball Park in Winston-Salem (fencing and railing), Legacy Saddlebreds in Winston-Salem (fencing, gates and access controls), Link Apartments Brookstown in Winston-Salem (balcony railing), and Pennybryn at Maryfield retirement community in High Point (rock walks, fencing and security gate systems).

Doug Stimmel, the president of Stimmel Associates, a landscape architectural firm based in Winston-Salem, believes that Fence Builders has been around so long "because they do what they say they were going to do, and they do good, quality jobs."

Frank L. Blum Construction Co., based in Winston-Salem, has been doing business with Fence Builders for the past 60 years.

Drew Hancock, Blum's chief executive, said that Fence Builders can always be depended on to do good work and at a reasonable price.

"And almost as important as both of those, we can always depend on them to stand behind their work whether they're maintaining a fence that's been around for a long time or whether they're putting in something new," Hancock said.

Hancock said that while fencing is Fence Builders' primary business, the fact that the company has morphed into the access control systems business "shows that they are keeping up with the times and staying current."

Shelton declined to give exact figures, but said that Fence Builders' sales are expected to be up 10 percent this year over 2014, when sales were flat.

He believes that the company has survived 60 years because it also services fences after the sale. He also credited the company's "skilled and devoted" employees.

Phylis Tesh, Fence Builders' office manager, has worked for the company since 1976.

"It really has been a family business," Tesh said. "We have a lot of long-term employees."

She said that when she comes to work it's almost the same as home.

“When I walk through that door, this is my family,” said Tesh, who started at the company when brothers John and Mark Shelton were still with the company.

The Shelton brothers grew up in a log house that still exists on Old Salisbury Road. Prior to starting their business, John Shelton was a manager of the farming supply and fencing division of Sears Roebuck Co. in Winston-Salem and his brother, Mark, had worked in regional sales for Merchants Distributors Inc.

Early on in business together, the brothers provided commercial and industrial chain link fence installations in the Winston-Salem market and throughout North Carolina.

“Back in the ‘50s there wasn’t much but chain link fence,” said Steve Shelton.

He said that the brothers had a limited number of competitors so they were able to broaden their market in the state.

“Those were good years to get started in business,” he said. “It was post World War II and manufacturing was big.”

In the 1970s, residential fence products became popular in this region. Fence Builders introduced its own line of custom wood fences and added a custom wood fabrication shop to complement its existing steel fabrication shop.

“The residential market got larger because there were different products,” Shelton said.

Originally, the business was at 1111 Old Salisbury Road but moved about a mile away to 1211 Old Salisbury Road in the late 1980s due to the construction of I-40. In 1999, the company expanded its operations, opening its administrative offices across the street at 1230 Old Salisbury Road.

“In the ‘90s, we started fabricating our own ornamental steel line,” said Shelton, who acquired ownership of the business from his father and uncle in 1995. “Ornamental fences, like rod iron type fences, started becoming popular.”

Fence Builders also introduced automated gate systems into its business in the 1990s.

Then came the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.

Shelton said that the era after 9/11 brought a heightened level of consumer security awareness. As a result, the company now offers complete perimeter security and anti-terrorism force protection, including layered security integration, access control, cameras, force protection “crash” rated fence, barriers and intrusion detection systems.

He said that Fence Builders has expanded its amount of high security projects for data centers, military installations and federal government facilities since 2007.

“People are looking for ways now to stop people from not only stealing their products but also harming them,” Shelton said.

Fence Builders has always done gate operators but transitioned into providing complete gate entry and access control systems in the 2000s when it formed its Perimeter Access Control Technologies division.

Rick Petry, the company’s production manager over access control and the fence division, said that providing gate operators is part of a system for perimeter protection, which includes the fence and lockable gates.

“Securing the outer perimeter becomes an integrated part of that system,” Petry said. “Motorized gates become more widely used and desired in the early 2000s, so it became a transition that many companies, including Fence Builders, moved into as part of the project.”

Petry said that many people are upgrading security for their homes.

“It’s hard for a burglar to get an idea of what’s on our property when they can’t even enter the property,” he said.

A new technology that Fence Builders is trying to introduce in the Triad market is SensorFence, provided by SensorFence Systems LLC in Hawthorne, Calif.

SensorFence is a patented perimeter intrusion detection technology aimed at providing detection capabilities on new and existing fences.

The technology, developed at Penn State’s Applied Research Laboratory, gathers acoustic vibrations generated on a perimeter fence and analyzes them in real time. It analyzes vibrations much the way a spider does.

“It sends the information on where the intruder is breaching your fence to your smartphone, computer or other device within seven seconds,” Shelton said. “You can also integrate cameras to it so you can actually see a video of the person while the intrusion is taking place.”

Shelton believes that the company’s residential market will remain strong over the next five years.

But, he said, “I think our growth is going to be more in securing and hardening the perimeters of facilities, whether it be private, municipal or governmental.”

Petry expects a lot of business growth to come from cities such as Charlotte and Raleigh where multifamily and mixed-used developments are booming. Shelton said that Fence Builders now has unlimited general contractors licenses in four states and has completed projects as far as Bakersfield, Calif., and El Reno, Okla. Being an unlimited general contractor means that the company is capable of doing more than just a fence, Shelton said.

In addition to its headquarters in Winston-Salem, the company has a sales/showroom in Greensboro and a sales office in Charlotte. Overall, it employs 38 people.

While the company does wood and steel fabrications onsite in Winston-Salem, it outsources some of its products, meaning they are manufactured in other states. It also sells and installs other company’s products, including PVC and vinyl fencing.

Shelton said he has fun doing what he does.

“I’m more excited about this business now than I ever have been,” Shelton said. “It’s because of new products and the new things that we are doing that make it exciting.”  
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### **Fence Builders Inc.**

Type of business: Privately held, family-operated company that primarily focuses on fences but offers other services.

Owner and president: Steve Shelton

Location: Winston-Salem

Offerings: Wood, vinyl, chain link, ornamental fencing; and gates and access control systems for homes and businesses. The company does sales, service and installation.

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