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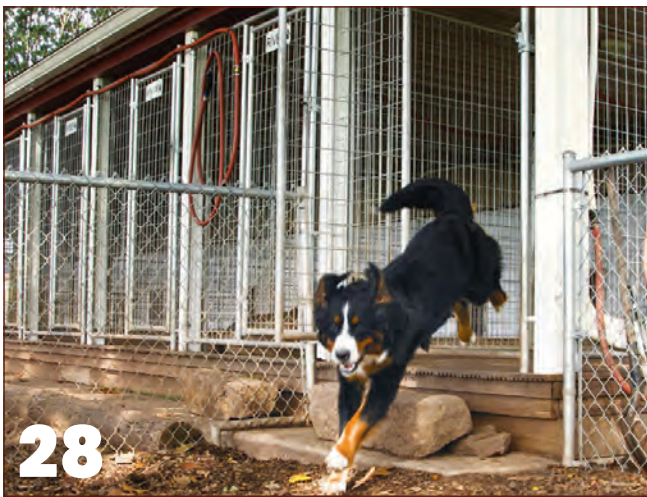
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Before the Year Gets Loud

From the Editor:

Over the years, I've had the opportunity to work alongside a lot of dedicated people in this industry, and my time with Shield Wall Media has been no exception.

Like many in construction-focused publishing, my path hasn't been a straight line—but that's part of what makes this role so rewarding. Being part of Shield Wall Media has meant staying close to the people who are actually building, designing and shaping the rural construction industry every day. It's meant listening, learning and doing my best to tell those stories in a way that reflects the real work happening out in the field.

What I've come to appreciate most is the consistency of this audience. Builders, suppliers and crews show up every day to get the job done, often without much recognition. If there's one thing I've tried to carry through my work here, it's making sure those efforts don't go unnoticed—and that the information we share is actually helpful when it reaches you.

As we continue growing *Plain Builder*, my focus remains the same: keep the content practical, keep it relevant and keep it grounded in the realities of the jobsite. That also means continuing to highlight the challenges and opportunities facing this segment of the industry.

Plus, there's a refreshing, uplifting, human element to *Plain Builder*. You'll find this magazine is different from our other magazines in that it also includes family focused features like a "Break Time" word search and even a coloring page for the children (or whoever else wishes to color it in).

Please tell me your suggestions or feedback about *Plain Builder*; I appreciate any lessons you can provide and ways we can make the magazine better and more valuable to you. There's always more to learn in construction—and from each other—and that's a big part of why I'm still here, and still enjoying the work.

— Karen Knapstein, Editor

715-952-1633 • karen@shieldwallmedia.com

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CORRECTION: In the Winter 2025 edition of Plain Builder, the wrong telephone number was listed for Fisher Barns in the What Do You Build section. The correct telephone number for Fisher Barns is 864-366-7333. Plain Builder regrets the error.

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Shield Wall Media supports and recommends the use of commonly accepted safety standards. We recognize, however, that members of some communities are exempt from such standards. To stay true to the members of the Plain Communities and the audience of Plain Builder, you will occasionally see photos in which government-mandated safety standards are not followed. Shield Wall Media does not endorse those practices.

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**Gary Reichert,
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Plain Builder (ISSN: 25530) (Vol. 2, No. 1) is published four times per year (March, June, September and December) by Shield Wall Media LLC, 150 Depot St., Iola, WI 54945. Periodical postage paid at Iola, WI, and at additional mailing offices. Canadian Agreement Number: 40665675. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Plain Builder, Camin Potts, PO BOX 255, Iola, WI 54945. Copyright 2026 Shield Wall Media LLC. Names and logos referred to or displayed in editorial or advertising content may be trademarked or copyright. Plain Builder assumes no responsibility for unsolicited materials sent to it. Publisher and advertisers are not liable for typographical errors that may appear in prices or descriptions in advertisements. Distributed at no cost across North America to those involved in rural construction.

ON THE COVER:

A post-frame shed project built by Quality Storage Buildings, seen in the What Do You Build feature.



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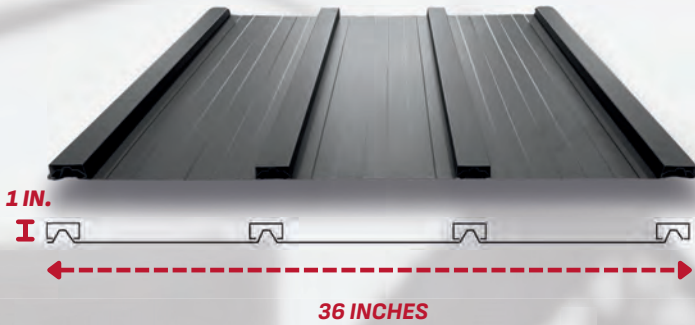
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Asphalt Shingle Success

12 Field-Ready Tips for Installing Asphalt Shingles

The Asphalt Roofing Manufacturers Association (ARMA, www.asphaltroofing.org) has a wealth of information available about asphalt roofing recommended practices. ARMA has prepared many technical bulletins and the Residential Asphalt Roofing Manual to aid roofers in the proper installation of various asphalt roofing systems. Here are some important tips for the successful installation of asphalt shingles.

1 Follow manufacturer instructions and local building codes

The first place you should look for shingle installation guidance is the instructions from the asphalt shingle manufacturer. You must always check local building codes.

2 Start with a solid deck

Your shingles are only as good as what's underneath. Before anything else, make sure the roof deck is flat, free of defects, and clear of debris. Any warps or gaps should be fixed before you install underlayment or shingles.

3 Lay underlayment flat and smooth

Different types of underlayment (self-adhering, synthetic, or saturated felt) require different application practices. Follow the directions for that material. Avoid wrinkles or buckles in underlayment, which may reduce performance and create uneven surfaces. Always install underlayment without folds and ensure seams are properly sealed when needed.

4 Use a proper starter course

Don't skip the starter course. It helps anchor the first row of shingles, gives



Pneumatic roofing nailer.
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cleaner edges, and improves wind resistance at the eaves. Manufacturers consider it a necessary element—not an option.

5 Stick to the recommended shingle layout (unless allowed otherwise)

Manufacturers provide layout patterns for each product for proper installation. ARMA recommends against “racking” (vertical alignment of joints) unless the product is approved for that installation method. Instead, offset successive courses to avoid vertical alignment of joints.

6 Keep exposures and rows consistent

Small deviations in exposure add up over a long slope. Use chalk or snap lines to keep every course aligned. If your exposure shifts a small amount on each course, alignment can be off significantly by the time you reach the ridge. Tight tolerances contribute to consistent, high-

quality results.

7 Flash details properly

Flashings are your roof's defense against leaks at walls, dormers, chimneys, and vent pipes. Flashings must stand the test of time. Use metals that resist corrosion, and size them so water is directed safely away from vulnerable joints and intersections. Use step flashing, counter flashing, and proper integration with shingles. Install each piece under shingle courses in a way that channels water off the roof. Avoid nailing the vertical face of flashing at wall intersections to permit movement between the roof and wall. ARMA's manual gives guidance on recommended placements and sizes for flashings.

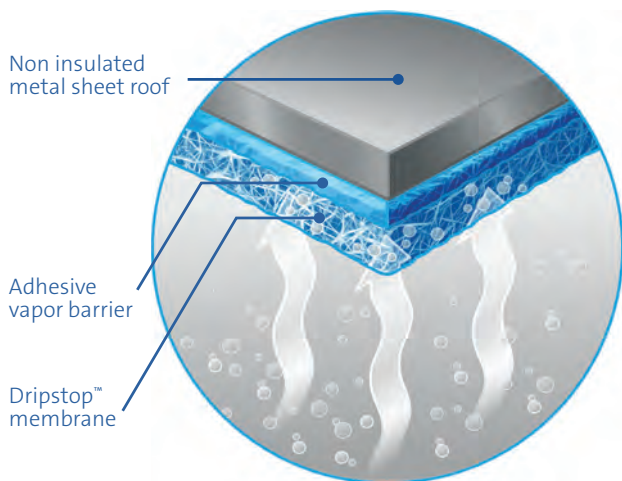
8 Design valleys carefully

Valleys are high-risk zones. Manufacturers provide guidance with several acceptable methods (open, closed, woven). Regardless of method, make sure

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to pay attention to the details specific to the valley type being installed.

9 Drive nails correctly

Nailing errors are a leading cause of issues. ARMA technical bulletins provide recommendations, including:

- Nails must be corrosion-resistant (galvanized, stainless, aluminum)
- Minimum shank diameter: 12 gauge (0.105 inch)
- Minimum head diameter: 3/8 inch
- Nails should penetrate at least 3/4 inch into the roof deck (or through the deck if thinner)
- Drive them flush—not overdriven or underdriven
- For standard applications, most shingles use four nails per shingle, unless the manufacturer says otherwise
- For applications in high wind areas, the shingle manufacturer may have special instructions
- Improper nailing contributes to blow-offs, raised tabs, and seal failures.

10 Plan for waste and complex geometry

Trim, cuts, dormers, hips, valleys—all result in waste. Waste allowances could

be anywhere from 2% to 10%, depending on roof complexity. Make sure your initial material order accounts for that so you don't run short mid-job.

11 Work penetrations and solar mounts smartly

With more roofs adding solar and mechanical penetrations, proper flashing design is critical. Keep penetrations minimal, place them where flashing can be robust, and account for thermal movement.

12 Inspect and maintain after installation

After installation and over the life of the roof, inspect flashings, seals, and areas prone to wear. Regular maintenance prolongs life.

BONUS TIP: Cold-Weather Installation

Guidance for cold-weather installs:

- Handle shingles gently in the cold—they can crack or break under stress.
- Shingles need to be flexible enough to use without damaging them. If necessary, store bundles indoors before use to keep them flexible.

• In very cold conditions, hand-sealing shingles with approved roofing cement may be needed.

WARNING: Working on a roof can be dangerous. ARMA reminds those engaged in roofing work to follow applicable safety regulations and safe work practices, including the use of all appropriate safety equipment.

Why These Tools Align With ARMA Guidance

- ARMA stresses proper nailing as one of the most critical performance factors. Having tools that ensure nails are placed and driven correctly is fundamental.
- Flashing and trim details are crucial for water shedding, so bending tools, caulk guns, and measuring tools become necessary for clean, durable transitions.
- Deck prep and cleanup are explicitly in ARMA's materials, so tools that aid tear-off and debris removal help meet those expectations.
- Safe and careful handling of shingle bundles (especially in heat) is part of ARMA's storage and handling recommendations, which means lifting and handling gear matters on site. **PB**

10 Tools Most Helpful for Installing Asphalt Shingle Roofs (Per ARMA)

1. Pneumatic roofing nailer (or properly adjusted pneumatic tool)

ARMA's Nail Application of Asphalt Strip Shingles states that "all nails are to be driven by hand or with a pneumatic nailing tool that has been properly adjusted to drive the nails correctly."

Getting the right drive ensures nails are flush—not over-driven or under-driven—which is critical to shingle performance and wind resistance.

2. Hand hammer (for spot nailing or adjusting nails)

Even when using pneumatic tools, some nails may have

to be adjusted by hand ("Under-driven nails can be tapped down. Remove overdriven or crooked nails ... and place another nail nearby.")

A hammer is useful for finishing nails or correcting misfires.

3. Chalk line / snap line

For keeping shingle courses straight and aligned, ARMA's manual describes snapping horizontal chalk lines



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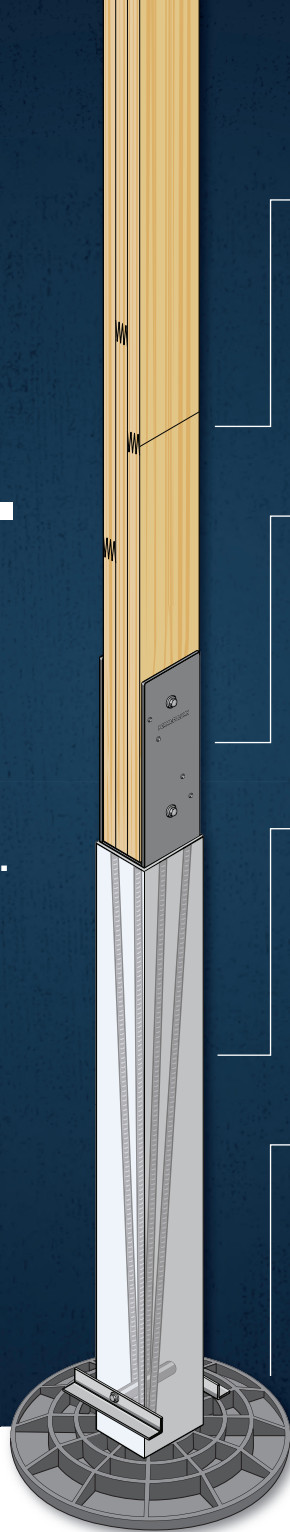
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parallel to the eaves and centerlines on long runs to split courses symmetrically.

This tool helps maintain consistent exposure and alignment across the roof slope.



4. Utility knife / roofing knife / hook blade knife

Cutting shingles for trim, hips, rakes, and valleys requires a sharp, durable knife. ARMA's installation chapters frequently refer to trimming shingles and shaping cutouts (especially in valleys, dormers, and flashing areas).

A good knife reduces tearing, ensures clean edges, and helps with fit around penetrations.

5. Drip edge / flashing bending tool or brake

Shingle systems require drip edge along eaves and rakes, as well as custom flashing at walls, chimneys, and other intersections (the ARMA manual devotes a full chapter to flashing).

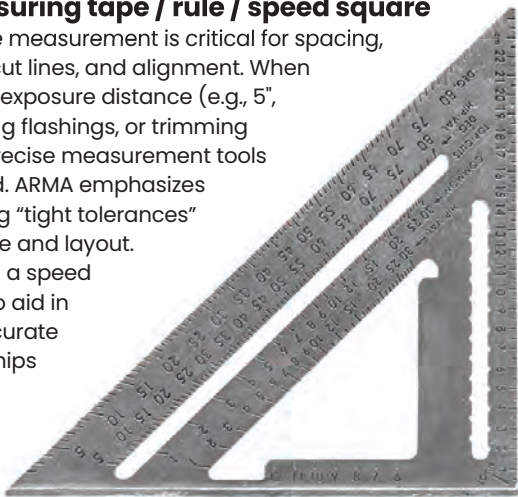
To fabricate drip edges or bend flashing materials to correct angles, a brake or bending tool is indispensable.



6. Measuring tape / rule / speed square

Accurate measurement is critical for spacing, exposure, cut lines, and alignment. When setting the exposure distance (e.g., 5", 6"), installing flashings, or trimming shingles, precise measurement tools are needed. ARMA emphasizes maintaining "tight tolerances" on exposure and layout.

Tools like a speed square also aid in cutting accurate angles for hips and ridges.



7. Roofing shovel / tear-off shovel / shingle remover tool

In roof replacement jobs, ARMA's manual includes instructions on stripping old roofing down to the deck and cleaning the deck before new application.

A roofing shovel or tear-off tool helps remove old shingles, underlayment, and debris efficiently.



8. Broom / roof broom / blower (for deck cleanup)

Before installing underlayment or shingles, the deck must be clean and free of debris, fastener protrusions, and loose material. ARMA's manual instructs sweeping the deck clean after tear-off.

A sturdy broom or blower ensures the deck surface is smooth and ready for underlayment.

9. Caulking gun / sealant or roofing cement applicator

ARMA's flashing and detail instructions often require applying asphalt roof cement or compatible sealant at flashing edges and cutouts.

A caulking gun or controlled applicator allows accurate dispensing of sealant where needed.



10. Bundle lifting / handling equipment (roof dolly, hoist, safety line, ladder setup)

While ARMA's manuals don't call out brand names, they do emphasize safety, proper handling of bundles, and avoiding bending or damaging shingles. For example, in hot-weather storage guidance, ARMA warns that shingles become more flexible and must be handled carefully to avoid damage.

Tools for safely lifting and placing bundles (e.g., roof hoists, hoisting rope systems, material handling carts) help preserve shingle integrity and improve installation efficiency. **PB**





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When a Good Jobsite Is Not Enough

The story of Sam Dienner and the part of the business many builders were never taught

For many men in the building trade, work is more than a paycheck. It is a way of life.

We learned young how to work with our hands. We learned how to show up early, use materials wisely, measure carefully, and stand behind what we build. Many of us learned from fathers and grandfathers who taught us that a good name matters, waste is costly, and honest work ought to speak for itself.

That kind of upbringing makes for good craftsmen.

But it does not always prepare a man for the office side of the business.

And that is where many good builders begin to feel strain.

Consider the story of Sam Dienner.

Sam of Dienner Custom Builders was the kind of man people respected. He knew the work. He could look over a job, spot a problem quickly, keep a crew moving, and turn out work a customer could take pride in. Like many builders, Sam started out with a simple belief: if he worked hard, treated people fairly, and did the job right, the business would take care of itself.

For a while, that seemed true.

But as the work increased, so did the burden that came with it.

Sam's hardest work was no longer only on the jobsite. Much of it was waiting for him after supper.

There were estimates to prepare. Bills to sort. Materials to check. Calls to return. Questions from customers. Questions from suppliers. Questions from the crew about what was coming next. Some information was written on paper. Some were in a notebook. Some were on a calendar. Some were in a text message. Some of it was simply being carried in his head from one

day to the next.

Like many builders, Sam could keep a job moving better than he could keep the office in order.

He was not lazy. He was not careless. He was doing what many hardworking men do when a company grows faster than its back office: he was carrying too much himself.

That kind of strain does not stay at the shop.

It follows a man home.

It sits with him at the kitchen table. It keeps running through his mind in the evening. It turns Saturdays into catch-up days. It can make a business look sound from the outside while too much underneath is being held together by memory, long hours, and constant effort.

Many builders know this feeling, even if they do not talk about it often.

On the jobsite, most men understand the value of order without having to be told. Materials are placed where they can be reached. Tools are kept where they belong. Measurements are checked. The crew knows the plan. Good work goes faster when things are clear.

The office is no different.

When estimating is done a different way each time, details get missed. When job information is scattered in too many places, things are forgotten. When customer conversations are not kept clearly, promises slip through the cracks. When labor, materials, and changes are not tracked until later, a job can look profitable long after the margin has already begun to disappear.

Usually the problem is not a lack of effort.

Usually it is a lack of order.

That was the lesson Sam came to

understand.

The turning point was not that he stopped caring about craftsmanship. It was that he began to see the office as part of the craft of running a good business. The back side of the company needed the same care as the field side.

So Sam began putting simple order where there had been too much guessing.

He worked toward handling estimates in a more consistent way. He made sure job details had a proper place. He kept better track of customer communication, schedules, changes, and costs while the work was still in progress instead of trying to sort it all out afterward. Rather than letting important details live in too many places, he moved toward keeping them together in one dependable place where they could be reviewed and acted on more easily.

The change was not flashy.

But it was important.

His crew had clearer information. Customers received better follow-through. Fewer details were lost. He had a truer sense of what jobs were producing. And perhaps most important of all, he was no longer carrying the same weight home with him every night.

The kitchen table gradually became a family table again instead of a second office.

That matters more than many men care to admit.

A disorderly office does not remain in the office. It affects the home, the family, the schedule, the peace of mind, and the future of the business itself. A man may be working hard from early morning until late evening and still feel uncertain because too much depends on memory and too much important information is scattered.

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Business Building

A good business needs more than skill in the field.

It also needs dependable habits in the office.

That does not mean a builder has to become someone he is not. It does not mean he must give up the work he loves or spend his days trying to be an office man. It simply means he must give proper attention to the part of the company that protects everything else.

Good builders already understand stewardship.

They understand taking care of materials, time, money, reputation, and the trust people place in them.

Office order is part of that same stewardship.

Clear estimating is stewardship.

Clear scheduling is stewardship.

Clear records are stewardship.

Knowing what a job is truly costing is stewardship.

Making sure the right people can find the right information at the right time is stewardship.

And building a company that does not constantly burden the home is stewardship too.

In recent years, more contractors have looked for better ways to bring estimating, scheduling, job details, communication, and job costs into better order. The approach may vary from one company to another, but the need is much the same: less confusion, less guessing, fewer dropped details, and better clarity about what is happening in the business from day to day.

That is not about chasing trends.

It is about building something steadier.

For a man in the trades, it is natural to take satisfaction in what can be seen at the end of the day: a straight line, a tight joint, a solid job, work done well. But the unseen side matters too. The office may not look like much from the road, yet it affects

nearly everything. The profit on the job, the trust of the customer, the confidence of the crew, and the peace a man carries home to his family.

Hard work remains necessary. It always will.

But hard work by itself is not always enough.

The story of Sam is not unusual because he lacked discipline or skill. It is familiar because many builders have stood in the same place. They know what it is to do excellent work with their hands while feeling stretched thin by the part of the business they were never really taught.

A good jobsite is a blessing.

So is a well-run office.

And when the two begin to work together, a business is in a much better position to serve customers well, provide stability for the family, and remain sound for years to come. **PB**



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Windows: Dutchland Windows from WEH Supply / 3-24"x36" Brown Single Pane Windows, 4-10"x36" Brown Single Pane Transom Windows

Other Details: Siding Color: Sherwin Williams French Roast (SW 6069) Super Paint

Trim: MiraTEC Treated Exterior Composite Trim

Trim Color: Sherwin Williams Tricorn Black (SW 6258) Super Paint

Drip Guard: Innovations Manufacturing / Aluminum Door Drip Guard above both doors

Shelving: 3-Tier 2'x3' Shelves • Workbench: 2'x3' Workbench - With a 3/4" ProStruct Top

Floors: 12" o/c with 2x4 Pressure Treated Floor Joist

Floor Sheeting: LP Outdoor Building Solutions / 3/4" LP ProStruct Flooring with SmartFinish

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Backyard Escapes

Stick-Built Pool House

Location: Maryland

Building Size: 8x36 • **Roof Pitch:** 8/12

Foundation: Concrete slab

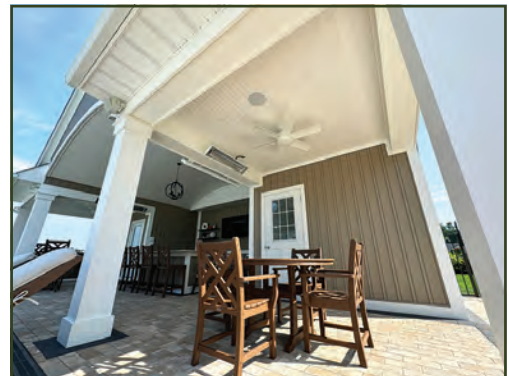
Shingles: GAF Black

Other: Straight Windowed Cupola

Description:

This pool house was designed to serve as the centerpiece of the owners' pool area, while also housing an outdoor kitchen, an indoor kitchen, and a bathroom. It features a custom arched center, vinyl board and batten siding, and a straight top windowed cupola as decoration.

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Elite Batten Panel

Elite Batten is a 36-inch coverage, hidden-fastener board and batten panel designed for post-frame construction. It provides the appearance of traditional board and batten siding while installing directly to standard exterior framing.

Elite Batten is installed using a two-part system. A base panel (Elite Rib) is applied to the structure in a conventional manner. Clips are then used to secure the panel to the girts, and snap-on batten strips are added to create the board and batten profile. The system is engineered to attach directly to typical post-frame wall framing without the need for solid sheathing.

Key Features:

36-inch panel coverage

Hidden fastener design

Direct-to-girt installation (no OSB or plywood required)

Snap-on batten strips for finished appearance

Compatible with standard post-frame construction methods

Because the system does not require a solid underlayment, it eliminates the additional material and labor associated with



installing OSB or plywood. Compared to traditional 10-inch board and batten panels, Elite Batten installs in approximately half the time, reducing overall labor requirements.

Designed for post-frame buildings, including residential, agricultural and light commercial projects, where a board and batten aesthetic is desired without the added complexity of traditional installation methods.

Elite Batten is a patent-pending system currently being adopted across the post-frame construction market. **PB**

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Top 10 Pointers for Successful Metal Panel Installation

Practical guidance for post-frame and light commercial construction

Metal siding has become a go-to solution across post-frame, agricultural, and light commercial construction. Its durability, low maintenance, and efficient installation make it a practical choice for a wide range of building types. However, achieving a clean appearance and long-term performance depends on more than simply choosing the right panels. Proper planning, appropriate material selection, and well-executed installation practices all play a role in the outcome.

The following ten pointers highlight key considerations that can help crews deliver consistent, high-quality metal panel installations.

1 Start with a Square and True Structure

A successful installation begins with the structure itself. Metal panels will follow whatever surface they are attached to, which means any irregularities in the framing will be visible once the panels are installed. Walls that are out of plumb or corners that are not square can lead to alignment issues that become more noticeable as installation progresses. Taking the time to verify that framing is straight, square, and consistent before panel installation begins will help prevent rework and improve the finished appearance.

2 Select Materials with the End Use in Mind

Choosing the right panel system is

critical, particularly in post-frame and light commercial applications where buildings are often exposed to demanding conditions. Panel gauge, profile, and material should all be considered together. Heavier gauge

material to the application ensures long-term performance and durability.

3 Understand Oil Canning Before It Becomes an Issue

Oil canning is a term used to describe the visible waviness that can appear in the flat areas of metal panels. It is an aesthetic condition, not a structural failure, but it can affect how a finished wall looks, particularly in certain lighting conditions. Several factors contribute to oil canning, including uneven framing, internal stress in the metal, over-driven fasteners, and thermal movement. While it cannot always be eliminated, it can be minimized by starting with a flat substrate, handling panels carefully, and installing fasteners correctly. Panel material and profiles with ribs or striations can also help reduce the visual effect. Understanding this characteristic upfront helps set realistic expectations and avoids unnecessary concern after installation.



Oregon State Hospital. PHOTO COURTESY OF IMETCO.

panels offer increased rigidity and can help reduce visible waviness, while panel profiles with deeper ribs improve strength and spanning capability. Panel materials also vary in performance. In environments where moisture, livestock, or chemicals are present, selecting a corrosion resistant material and finish is crucial. Matching the

4 Handle Panels Carefully from Delivery to Installation

Damage to panels often occurs before they are ever installed. Improper handling can lead to bent panels or scratched finishes, both of which can affect performance and appearance.

Carrying panels in a vertical position helps prevent bending, while avoiding contact between panel surfaces reduces the risk of scratching. Storing panels off the ground and protected from moisture is also important, especially if they will be on

site for any length of time. Good handling practices help ensure the panels perform as intended once installed.

5 Plan the Layout Before Starting Installation

A well-planned layout helps maintain a consistent appearance and reduces the need for adjustments during installation. Determining a starting point, confirming panel coverage widths, and considering how panels will terminate at corners or openings are all part of this process.

Establishing reference lines such as chalk lines or string lines can help keep panels aligned throughout the installation. Taking a few extra minutes to plan can prevent uneven panel widths and cumulative alignment errors.

6 Incorporate Moisture Management Strategies

Even with metal siding, a weather resistant barrier provides an added layer of protection against moisture and air infiltration. While it may be omitted in some simpler structures, it contributes significantly to the overall wall system performance. Incorporating this layer can help manage moisture that gets behind the panels and improve building performance and longevity.




Oregon State Hospital. PHOTO COURTESY OF IMETCO.

7 Use Proper Fasteners and Installation Technique

Fasteners play a critical role in both the performance and appearance of metal siding. Using the correct fasteners, typically those recommended by the panel manufacturer, helps ensure compatibility

and durability. Fasteners should be driven straight and seated snugly without being over tightened. Over driving screws can damage sealing washers and create opportunities for leaks, while inconsistent fastening can lead to panel distortion. Use recommended fasteners and adhere



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to proper installation methods. Correct fastening ensures durability, weather resistance, and a clean appearance.

8 Monitor Alignment Throughout the Installation

Maintaining alignment is an ongoing process. Even small deviations at the start of a wall can become more pronounced as additional panels are installed. Checking alignment regularly using a level or string line allows for small corrections before issues become more noticeable. Staying attentive during installation helps ensure a straight, uniform finished surface.

9 Allow for Thermal Movement

Metal expands and contracts with temperature changes, and installations should account for this natural movement. If panels are restrained too tightly, movement can lead to buckling or added stress at fasteners. Avoiding over tightening

fasteners and following recommended installation details allow the system to accommodate these changes. Considering temperature conditions during installation can also help reduce potential issues.

10 Treat Details as Critical Components, Not Afterthoughts

While the field of the panel often performs well, transitions, trim and flashing details are where most failures occur. Properly installed trim and flashing help direct water away from the building and complete the system. Ensuring that trim pieces are properly aligned, overlapped, and installed according to best practices improves both performance and overall appearance.

Final Thoughts

Metal panel installation may seem straightforward, but consistent execution

is what separates an average job from a high-quality one. From selecting the right materials to maintaining alignment and handling panels properly, each step contributes to the outcome. By focusing on these fundamentals, builders can deliver metal siding installations that not only look good when completed but continue to perform reliably over time.

PB

This article was developed with input from professionals experienced in the design and manufacture of pre-engineered metal panel systems for a wide range of construction applications.

Tarek Droubi is the Engineering Manager at IMETCO, where he leads the Engineering Services team and supports research and development initiatives that drive innovation in metal building envelope systems.

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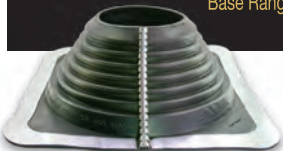
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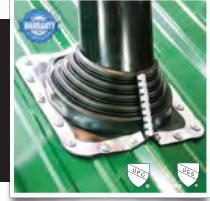
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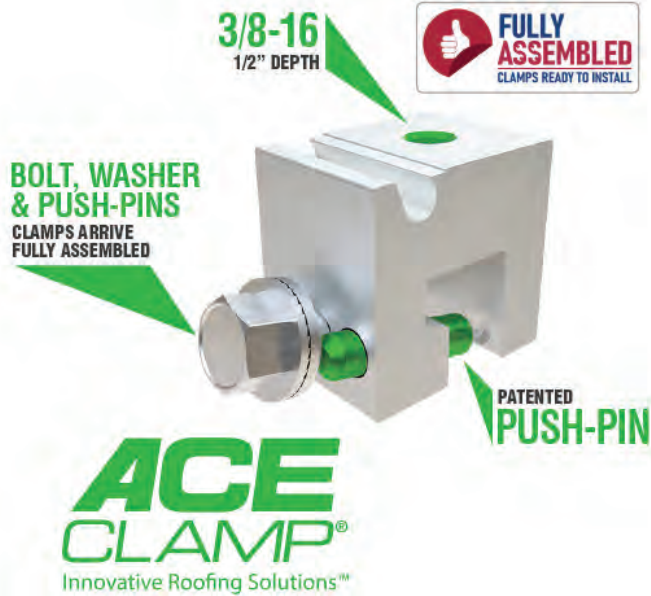


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Building for Animals

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Imagine a space designed and dedicated to your animals' comfort and safety. A place where every detail is intentional and shaped by the builder's experience and knowledge. Building with these principles in mind has taught me valuable lessons that have helped me become a better builder overall. The insights and creative problem-solving I've gained from designing animal shelters have shaped the way I approach all kinds of building, well beyond animal structures.

The Rise in Demand for Animal Shelters

The demand for purpose-built animal structures has grown dramatically since I first began building chicken coops with The Hen House Collection. Since starting my businesses, I've noticed that customers are looking for custom-designed shelters for their animals that cater to their unique needs, not just a generic new or renovated shed. For every animal, there are different needs that must be met. For example, dogs and chickens bring



Dog kennelling facility in Connecticut.

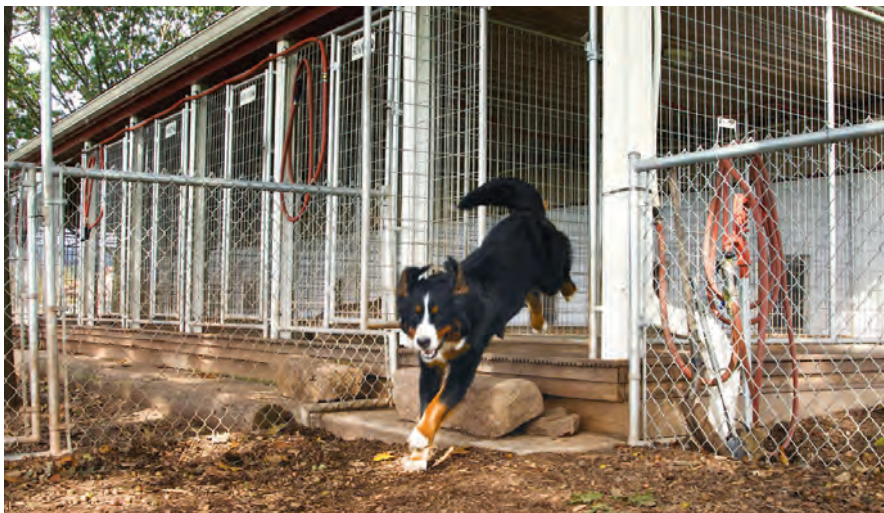
moisture through water bowls, urine, and by tracking in rain, snow, and mud. If left unchecked, this can easily lead to mold, rot, and rust in the shelter. My team and I address these challenges by starting with our initial design layout and building by prioritizing the animals' well-being and safety. Providing these structures to

our customers has helped to expand the market for thoughtfully designed, long-term-use shelters.

The most important thing to keep in mind is that customers are looking for shelters that are durable, above all else. That's why there is such high demand for builders who specialize in animal-specific construction. Only those specialized builders who have spent years creating chicken coops or dog kennels understand the importance of predator-proofing, species-specific ventilation, and durable animal-safe materials. Their experience equips them to anticipate the unique challenges animals pose, such as chewing, digging, or pecking, ensuring the completed structure is both safe and functional in ways that general builders may overlook.

Common Building Trends in Pet Structures

Lately, there has been a basic trend in layouts for pet structures, while still allowing owners the option to choose how they want their structures to look



The team at The Dog Kennel Collection designs structures that prioritize animal comfort and safety.

aesthetically and how they want their structure to fit into their own space. There has also been a strong emphasis on more robust door systems, improved drainage plans, and integrated ventilation rather than add-on vents. Now more than ever, builders are paying closer attention to the materials they use to ensure the comfort and safety of the animals, including the effects of moisture and cleaning chemicals on both the structure and the animals.

Staying Clear Of Unmodified Sheds Or Generic Outdoor Structures For Animals

Using sheds as the base foundation for these projects can be hazardous for animals if you don't know what you're doing. General-purpose sheds will rarely meet the requirements for an animal shelter. It's important to note that manufactured sheds are designed for static storage, not for housing living animals, and frequently lack proper ventilation and sanitation. Overlooking these renovation needs can lead to complications such as poor air quality, moisture buildup, and unsafe surfaces, which can all result in injury to your shelter and animals if not addressed, especially without animal-friendly materials. However, you can convert these generic sheds for pets if you take the right steps. When making such adjustments, builders should rework the wall structure to improve airflow, upgrade the flooring to withstand repeated moisture exposure, and reinforce the doors and hardware to



Smooth, sealed floors and walls that resist moisture and won't trap dirt. PHOTOS COURTESY OF ELAM MILLER, THE DOG KENNEL COLLECTION.

support thermal regulation. In general, it's better to just design or build a structure specifically with your animals in mind.

How A Dog Kennel Is Different From Other Structures, Such As A Chicken Coop, A Shed, Or A Barn

A valuable mindset for any builder is to think like a specialist, even if you're not one. For example, a dog kennel builder must pay close attention to how dogs interact with their environment: chewing, scratching, and pacing demands tougher fasteners and damage-resistant materials.

Chicken coop builders focus on more predator-proof features and controlled ventilation, while barn builders prioritize scale, weight distribution, and equipment access.

Building For Animals: Key Considerations

Ventilation:

Ventilation doesn't just keep animals cool in the summer. Ventilation also helps remove moisture year-round, which will help your animals stay warm and comfortable even in the winter. For many enclosed shelters, the best year-

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Closer Look

round ventilation for an animal shelter is mechanical controlled ventilation (MCV) or a zoned HVAC system with negative pressure. This will ensure air is exhausted rather than recirculated.

Durability:

Animal structures experience more wear and tear than most other buildings. That's why it's important to use robust framing, strong fasteners, and materials that can withstand chewing, scratching, or pecking from either dogs, horses, cows, or birds. High-density polyethylene (HDPE) panels are non-porous and resist damage, while fiberglass reinforced panels (FRP) offer extra strength and are resistant to moisture. Choosing durable materials like these means less maintenance, fewer repairs, and a safer shelter for your animals.

Sanitation:

Proper cleaning and disinfection minimize pathogen load, reduce pest populations, limit zoonotic disease transmission to humans, and improve livestock productivity. Install smooth, sealed floors and walls that resist moisture and won't trap in dirt, such as epoxy moisture barriers and coatings. Sheet vinyl is also an excellent choice for damp areas that are prone to moisture buildup.



Smooth, sealed floors and walls that resist moisture and won't trap dirt. PHOTOS COURTESY OF ELAM MILLER, THE DOG KENNEL COLLECTION.

Materials:

Use pressure-treated wood with more animal-safe, less hazardous preservatives like alkaline copper quaternary (ACQ) or copper azole (CA), and avoid chromated copper arsenate-treated wood, which is toxic. Seal or cover any areas animals might chew or peck with a non-toxic, durable, animal-safe barrier such as water-based coatings. This will prevent animals from having direct contact with the pressure-treated wood.



Fetching Results

A valuable mindset for any builder is to think like a specialist, even if you're not one. This means approaching every project with the attention to detail a specialist would bring. For example, when considering ventilation, durability, sanitation, or materials, a builder should consider how these factors apply specifically to each animal and environment. By applying a specialized approach to each aspect, builders can create better, safer spaces that will best meet the needs of animals and their owners. In my experience, adopting this mindset has helped my team design structures that truly prioritize animal comfort and safety. **PB**

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E-Impact Marketing Announces Completion of Ownership Transition

E-Impact Marketing, a full-service digital marketing agency founded in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, in 2015, has officially completed a transition in ownership. As of February 4, 2026, the company is now led by new co-owners Eric Wenger, James Charles, and Joel Steele, who succeeded the founder of E-Impact, Chris Stoltzfus. Stoltzfus stepped down as CEO of E-Impact to spend more time at other business ventures and to focus on writing and teaching.

E-Impact Marketing helps small and mid-sized businesses grow online through services like web-site design, SEO, and content creation. Founded by Chris Stoltzfus in 2015, E-Impact has since relocated its headquarters to downtown Lancaster and opened an office in Brooklyn, New York, to better serve its diverse client base. The company’s commitment to client success has earned national recognition, including spots for E-Impact on the Inc. 5000 list in 2024 and 2025, the 2025 Financial Times Fastest Growing Companies List, and recognition as a Google Premier Partner in 2025.

The new owners aim to build upon the strong foundation established by Stoltzfus, bringing fresh perspectives and specialized expertise to drive future growth for both the company and its customers.



This change marks a new era for the company; the collective leadership of Wenger, Charles, and Steele will shape not only E-Impact’s future but also its role in the evolving digital marketing industry.

For James Charles, Co-owner and COO, “stewardship” rather than “ownership” defines his vision of the future for E-Impact. He says, “This business is an avenue to serve and bless a lot of people, and our goal is to protect it and ensure it reaches its full potential.”

Joel Steele, Co-owner and CPO (Chief People Officer), is most excited about connecting with more people as E-Impact grows. For Steele, “The future of E-Impact starts with the people. As we grow and shift with the ever-changing digital landscape, we get to keep recruiting amazing individuals to help take us into the future. Our people are what set us apart from other organizations.”

Together, the team is set up to continue delivering meaningful and measurable results for clients in sectors such as storage sheds and garages, pole barns and roll forming, and construction and outdoor living. They also have their eyes on what’s next. As Steele puts it, “In the future, I see us adopting new profit centers, perfecting our craft, and always being on the front lines of what the digital world demands of us.”

This new leadership team is strategically guiding E-Impact Marketing towards continued growth. **PB**

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Building Stronger Relationships

Practical Ways To Work More Effectively with Distributors and Manufacturers

Builders in the Plain Communities are known for quality workmanship, honesty, and dependability. These strengths have built long standing demand for your construction services, especially in agricultural, post-frame, and light commercial markets.

As the building industry has continued to change, many suppliers, manufacturers, dealers, and distributors now rely heavily on digital communication which can create challenges for some portions of the Plain Communities.

Strong business relationships are still possible and can be very successful when builders set up communication channels in advance and have a plan to stay informed.

Increasingly Digital Business World

Most large building products manufacturers and distributors communicate at least partially through email, online portals, digital price lists, and app-based contractor programs. These tools are designed for speed and scale, but they often assume anytime internet access.

When builders don't respond to an email or online request, suppliers may mistakenly believe there is no interest or that the message has been received and there are no questions, when, in reality, the message may never have been seen.

The construction industry moves quickly. Prices change, products evolve, and contractor programs come and go. Builders who rely only on word of mouth may miss important opportunities.

By staying organized, maintaining trusted relationships, and communicating clearly about preferences, builders can stay informed without compromising their values.

1. Take a Proactive Approach

Builders can strengthen outside business

relationships by being clear and intentional about how they prefer to work. The majority of suppliers and dealers are happy to adjust their processes or formats to accommodate those preferences. Make sure that key suppliers and dealers understand your preferred method of communication and have your up-to-date contact information, which could include the mailing address or phone number where you want key business information communicated.

2. Choose a Consistent Point of Contact

Many successful builders work directly in-person with a trusted dealer, driver, bookkeeper, or business partner who regularly also interacts digitally with the major manufacturers or other parts of the distribution channel. Having one known contact that is available for regularly-occurring in-person communication helps prevent missed messages that may have been communicated digitally. Don't have one of these points of contact? Don't be afraid to ask your supplier or dealer for one – most would love to help.

2. Keep a Central Information Binder

Making and maintaining a binder of the most updated product information for each manufacturer or supplier can be a powerful business tool. Many of these items are available in digital formats on companies' websites, but physical copies of brochures, color lists, warranties, price pages, and delivery schedules can be obtained by directly requesting from the manufacturer or by picking up the physical items from your preferred local dealer location. It is critical to ask periodically regarding any changes to the product offering and replace with the most up-to-date physical assets.

3. Schedule Regular Check Ins

Rather than waiting for changes to arrive unexpectedly, builders can schedule monthly or quarterly in-person meetings with key manufacturing or distribution

representatives. These meetings help builders stay ahead of price changes, new products, and program deadlines.

4. Ask for Information in the Right Format

Most suppliers are willing to adapt if they understand the need. Asking for printed copies, mailed updates, or in-person explanations often leads to better communication than trying to fit into digital systems that don't work well for everyone.

Making the Most of Relationships

Local dealers and distributors are often the strongest bridge between Plain Community builders and manufacturers. These partners understand regional needs and can explain programs, provide materials, and advocate on a builder's behalf.

Building loyalty with a nearby dealer through consistent business and open communication, often results in better service, clearer information, and fewer surprises.

Mutual Respect Builds Strong Business

Strong partnerships do not require abandoning tradition. They require understanding.

Manufacturers and distributors benefit from the reliability and craftsmanship of Plain Community builders. Builders benefit from suppliers who respect their communication style and provide information in usable ways.

When both sides communicate with patience, clarity, and respect, business relationships grow stronger, more efficient, and more profitable for everyone involved.

In the end, good business is still built the same way it always has been on trust, consistency, and reliability. **PB**

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Before the Year Gets Loud

As work ramps up and schedules fill in, a reminder to keep God, family, work, and joy in the right order—before momentum makes the decision for you.

I've spent enough years around construction to recognize this moment right away. You're sitting at your desk between phone calls, maybe glancing at a calendar or a stack of quotes, and you can feel it building. The year is waking up, work is lining up, and schedules are starting to fill in, bringing that familiar mix of excitement and responsibility that tells you it's time to get moving.

That kind of excitement is a good thing, but it's also the moment when it's easiest to lose hold of what matters most.

I don't say that as a warning. I say it as a reminder from someone who's had to relearn it more than once. When work starts rolling, it has a way of crowding everything else toward the edges if you let it. Not because work is bad, but because it's demanding. It wants attention, it wants time, and it rarely knows when to stop on its own.

I used to think the goal was balance, but I'm not sure that's the right word anymore. Balance makes it sound like everything weighs the same.

It doesn't.

What I've come to believe is that life works better when you keep the important things in order.

God first.

Family second.

Work after that.

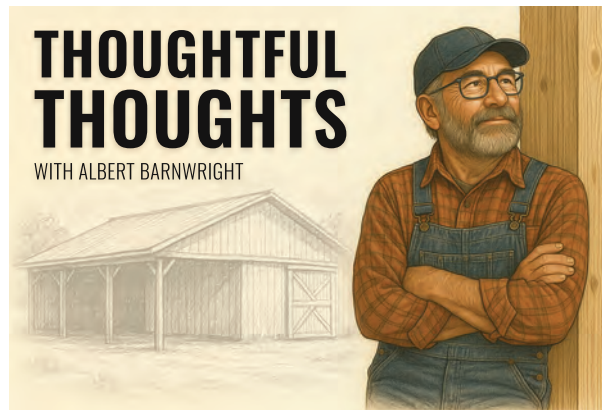
And play somewhere in there too, because joy matters more than we sometimes admit.

When those things stay in that order, the year tends to carry better. Not easier, but better.

I've watched men try to flip that order around, putting work first, family when there's time, and faith squeezed in

wherever it fits. Most of the time, it looks fine from the outside, but on the inside it's exhausting. You can make good money and still feel like you're falling behind where it counts.

I've lived that version, and it's not one I'm eager to repeat.



Keeping God first usually shows up in small ways. It's not about getting it right or doing it the same way every day. It's starting the morning aware that the work ahead isn't yours alone to carry. It's a quiet prayer before the phones start ringing, or a short one offered up before a tough decision instead of rushing through it. It's being grateful when things go smoothly and steady when they don't. Most days, it's simply trusting that God is present in the middle of ordinary work, listening as much as leading, and walking with you through the day instead of waiting somewhere off at the finish line.

Family comes next, and that one takes intention. Building seasons don't slow down on their own, so you have to decide that dinners matter, that phone calls home matter, and that being present when you're there matters more than being impressive somewhere else.

Work fits best when it's carried inside those boundaries. It works better when

it's done with care instead of urgency, and with pride in craftsmanship instead of pressure to do more than is wise. There's a difference between working hard and being driven. One builds something lasting, while the other eventually takes more than it gives.

And play, real play and not distraction, belongs in the mix too. Laughter, rest, and time away from the noise aren't rewards for finishing the season. They're part of what keeps you steady enough to walk through it.

As this year picks up speed, there's going to be plenty to do, plenty of decisions to make, and plenty of moments where it feels easier to say yes than to stop and think. That's normal. Still, it's worth pausing now, before things get loud, and deciding what you're going to protect.

Protect your time with God.

Protect your people.

Protect the kind of work you can stand behind.

Protect the joy that reminds you why you started doing this in the first place.

A good year isn't measured only by what gets built or sold. It's measured by whether you can look back and say you stayed true to what matters most while you did it.

That's a year worth being excited about.

PB

Albert Barnwright writes from a life shaped by both faithfulness and failure. His words come from hard lessons, honest repentance, and a faith-rooted view of work, responsibility, and stewardship. He writes to help others learn without shame, carry responsibility with care, and keep what matters most at the center of their work, faith, and daily lives.

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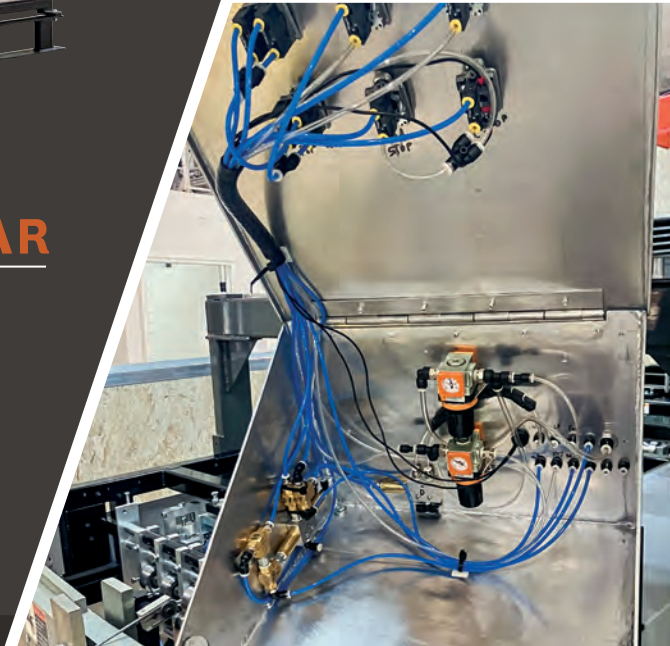
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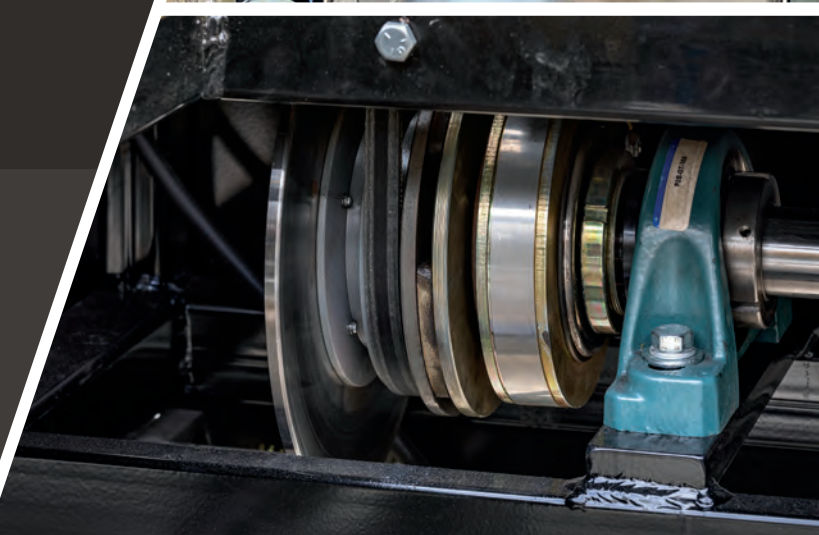
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