

## Michael Perry - Aqua Shield

This is Kansas Profile. I'm Ron Wilson, director of the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development at Kansas State University.

Hobbs, New Mexico. A large apartment complex is being built. The roof is being installed by a crew from a company in rural Kansas. Today we'll learn about the remarkable growth of this entrepreneurial roofing company. It's today's Kansas Profile.

Michael Perry and Angel "Luis" Guzman are co-owners of Aqua Shield Roofing in Hugoton, Kansas. This roofing and construction company is serving customers across Kansas, neighboring states, and beyond.

Michael grew up in Morton County at the rural community of Rolla, population 467 people. Now, that's rural. He graduated from Fort Hays State, married Liz, farmed for a time and then started selling roofing products for a friend. There he met Luis Guzman who was operating a roofing crew. Eventually he and Luis decided to get together and go out on their own.

In 2005, Michael and Luis launched their own roofing company. Michael specialized in sales and Luis was responsible for operations. But what should it be named? "I wanted something that started with an A so it would be at the top of the telephone listings," Michael said. "I'm a big Chiefs fan and I wanted to name it Arrowhead, but the guys nixed the idea.

"We were drinking Aquafina water, and we got to thinking about the word Aqua," Michael said. "My partner is Hispanic and I wanted to honor that," he said. "The word Aqua sounds kind of like Agua, the Spanish word for water. Then my cousin said it should be Aqua Shield, cause we protect people from the rain," Michael said.

"We didn't care what it was called, we just wanted to work," he said. And work they did. In the beginning, they worked from their homes. As the business grew, they rented office space in Ulysses and eventually established their main office near where they were living in Hugoton. They went on to open offices in Oberlin and Liberal.

Aqua Shield Roofing and Construction served lots of customers. One of those was owner of a hardware store in a neighboring community. In 2013, the hardware store owner approached them about purchasing the store which they ultimately did.

Today, Aqua Shield Roofing and Construction works on roofing, siding, guttering, windows, doors, and spray foam insulation. As general contractors, they can work on building additions and remodels or virtually anything for home construction.

Aqua Shield Roofing and Construction has served customers as far east as Junction City, Manhattan, and Lawrence. Besides covering western Kansas and doing a job in Hobbs, New Mexico, the company serves customers in southern Nebraska, eastern Colorado, and the Oklahoma panhandle. At any given time, the company may be employing crews with 40 or 50 people. "My wife Liz has been the rock that has kept me strong and focused on this difficult endeavor called business," Michael said.

What are the keys to operating a rural business successfully? "Honesty, quality help, and customer service," Michael said. "You've got to surround yourself with quality people. Taking care of the customers is the key."

The latest part of their venture was the spray foam insulation which was added in 2014. Richard Vertrees partnered with them to build this part of the business.

As the company website says, Aqua Shield Roofing and Construction seeks “the highest quality of workmanship and expertise in residential homes and commercial projects. Our promise is to continue offering our customers the absolute best in quality and service and always maintain our competitive pricing.” The company is especially proud of its A+ ranking from the Better Business Bureau.

For more information, go to [www.aquashieldroofing.com](http://www.aquashieldroofing.com).

It’s time to leave Hobbs, New Mexico, where a roofing crew from rural Kansas has built roofs for these new apartment complexes. We salute Michael and Liz Perry, Angel Guzman, Richard Vertrees and all those involved with Aqua Shield Roofing and Construction for making a difference with hard work and entrepreneurship. When it comes to celebrating rural businesses, it makes me want to raise the roof.

And there’s more. The hardware store which they purchased has a remarkable level of proficiency – in language as well as hardware. We’ll learn about that next week.

For the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development, this is Ron Wilson with Kansas Profile.