



MR. SOUTHERN CARPET

FOR 60 YEARS, JOHNNY JACKSON HAS BEEN DOING THINGS ONLY ONE WAY—THE RIGHT WAY—AND THERE’S NO SIGN OF HIM SLOWING DOWN ANY TIME SOON.

by PAIGE TOWNLEY

When Johnny Jackson first started laying carpet, gasoline was just 24 cents. The average house price was around \$10,000. The top show on TV was *Gunsmoke*. The year was 1957, and twenty-one-year-old Jackson had just started working for Southern Carpet, Hardwood & Tile, or actually Southern Carpet and Rug Cleaning, as it was known at the time. Newly married Jackson didn’t originally intend on making a career in the carpet business; it was just by chance. “I went to the employment agency seeking a job,” he explained. “They placed me here, and I’ve been here ever since.”

While today he’s known as the go-to-person for practically anything regarding carpet installation, Jackson started out as a helper. He spent the first couple of years assisting installers, then going home at night teaching himself how to sew carpet. “Johnny would go home after work and practice making the seams,” said Tim Hightower, the company’s owner/president, who purchased the company in 1987. “Back then, everything had to be sewed. So he practiced on his own every night.”

The self-taught carpet installer soon moved his way up to installer, training others on how to do it. “When I first worked here it was as a salesman, and the owner at that time actually sent me out with Johnny to lay carpet so that I would get the experience and know how it really works,” said Hightower. “Johnny has trained quite a few people to lay carpet over the years.”

He’s also worked on some of the company’s biggest projects over the years as well. One of the biggest flooring projects was the 30-floor South Central Bell Building, which eventually became known as the BellSouth Building and then the AT&T City Center until just recently. Constructed in the early 1970s, it was the tallest building in Birmingham until the mid-1980s. Southern Carpet was a subcontractor on the project installing all of the carpet. “We did all floors,” said Jackson. “It was still under construction when we were working, and the scariest part of the job was installing the carpet on a balcony on the very top floor with the wind blowing the carpet up as fast as we could lay it down.”

Jackson also worked as the lead installer for a project at EBSCO when the company renovated its corporate headquarters in the early 1990s. “I can remember working with Johnny since the early 1980s, and he’s always been our preferred installer for projects because he could make anything work,” said Becky Caldarello, vice president at EBSCO. “He’s been the fix-it guy for us all these years, and he’s a great person.” Jackson’s reputation for being able to handle any project was well known around the office as well. Added Hightower, “When we had a big project, we always knew Johnny was the one to put on it because we knew it would be done right,” he said. “The only way Johnny knows how to lay carpet is one way, and that’s the right way.”

That mindset of always doing things the right way was instilled in Jackson at an early age by his grandmother. Jackson’s mother passed away after he was born. His grandmother stepped in to raise him, moving him to Birmingham from Savannah, Georgia—where he was born—at the age of five. “She always told me, ‘Whatever job you get, if you can’t do it right, don’t do it at all,’” said Jackson. “She preached that to me just about every day, and I’ve lived by that all my life.”

One way Jackson has long succeeded in doing things the right way is being positive in all he does, adds Hightower. “He always has a positive attitude,” he said. “He’s always in a good mood.” He’s also consistent. He rises early every day—around 4:30 am—and is to work by 6:30 am. “I usually exercise before I come in every morning, and if I am running late and don’t have time I do it when I get here,” Jackson added. “You have to be a go-getter.”

Today Jackson no longer installs carpet, instead he runs the company’s warehouse, unloading trucks as they come in and putting everything in its correct place. “Now I can manage the warehouse with just me and a forklift,” Jackson added. “Back in the day it would have taken five or six people because we didn’t have forklifts when I first started in this business. I’ve seen a lot of change through the years, and that’s a big one.”



daughter, Kesha, and grandchildren, as well as serving as a trustee at his church, Sardis Baptist Church. While he has a lot to keep him busy outside of work, he has no plans to slow down or retire any time soon. While chance originally brought Jackson to Southern Carpet six decades ago, his love of his job and his co-workers is what's keeping him there now. "I'm going to work as long as I feel good," Jackson said. "I can't just sit around the house; that doesn't work for me. And it's like a big family here at Southern Carpet. I plan on hanging around."



While much has changed throughout Jackson's 60 years at Southern Carpet, much has stayed the same. He's still as committed as ever to doing the best job he can. In fact, Jackson occasionally still goes to jobsites to help whenever possible. "He does still go out sometimes to supervise a big project or when he's called upon to fix something that no one else can," Hightower said. "Years ago I started calling him Mr. Southern Carpet because he's so important to us. He's more than just an employee. He's a good friend."

Jackson's friends and co-workers at Southern Carpet recently hosted a party to celebrate his 60 years of service to the company—after having already hosted another party when he reached 50 years. "After the party we had for him at 50 years with the company, we never really thought about having another one," Hightower said. "I know you typically have parties like this when someone is getting ready to retire, but we don't want him to do that. He's an integral part to our family here." Monika Hurt, the company's bookkeeper, further emphasizes what Jackson means to the company. "He's an inspiration for all of us other employees because of the amount of time he's been here and his whole positive outlook," she said. "He doesn't let anything phase him or get him rattled. He just proceeds on day to day, always positive and upbeat. He's a pleasure to work with. In fact, seeing Johnny can sometimes make your day. He's that type of person."

In addition to celebrating 60 years with Southern Carpet, he's also celebrating 60 years with his wife, Eula. He's also busy spending time with his son, Johnny,



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