

Professional Pavement Products, Inc.

The name says it all – Professional Pavement Products, Inc. (PPP).



Some of the more than 650 products found in PPP's Orlando Warehouse

In 1996 company founder and President Greg Driskell had a vision about what that name was going to mean in the roadway safety industry – and he's spent the last 14 years making that vision into a reality. The core of the vision can be summed up in three words; products, service and knowledge. It's clear that nothing moves forward at PPP – no idea – no product – no business initiative – unless it aligns with this well-developed vision. Next comes the plan – "Everything we do, from the way we answer the phone to the way we ship a product, is by design," says Driskell. "The plan's design must ensure that this idea can be systematically implemented within our organization to maximize success now and in the future." The plan is then carefully executed allowing the initial idea to become a successful reality. "I spent the first four months of our company just building our initial structure and systems, and I've never stopped."

Wait, you say. This is a roadway safety products distributor you're talking about. What's all this about vision and planning and execution? Simply put, this is how Greg Driskell does business – and he does it very well.

"The first, second, third and fourth person I hired back in the beginning still work for me," says Driskell. "Our turnover is extremely low. I don't hire from within the industry. I bring people in, we teach them, testing and increasing their knowledge along the way. We help them develop their own vision of success, and then provide them with the vehicle to achieve that success." The company's structure features key officers who Driskell depends on, including National Relationship Manager Steve Norkus (who's been with the company for 11 years); Vice President Glenn Milton (four years), Regional Manager Monika Thompson, who oversees the daily sales and operations of all their facilities (12 years), and Debbie Driskell, Greg's wife, who runs their Accounting Department. "Last time we were on vacation, Debbie got more phone calls than I did. That's how key she is to our company's successful operations." He added, "I also have

an employee who's been with me for all 14 years we've been in business – Bob Parker, who's the manager of our busiest warehouse here in Jacksonville. Without the hard work and dedication of all these people and countless others, we wouldn't be where we are today."

The first 180 days for any new PPP employee is quite a ride. Unless a particular staffing need is immediate, Driskell likes to begin every new employee in the warehouse, so they can begin the process of learning about the business from the ground up. "We test their knowledge regularly as we teach them about our company, products and industry" says Driskell. "We've developed a two-part study guide that they use to assist them in learning. Every employee must have a thorough knowledge of all our products and their proper applications in the field." After 180 days of employment, employees must pass a knowledge test with a score of 90% or higher (remember your SATs? There are 200 questions on Part One and 150 questions in Part Two) - and the learning doesn't stop there. "We hold weekly Open Line Training (OLTs) for 90 minutes every Thursday night. Some are mandatory, like when we're introducing a new product to the marketplace, but most of them are voluntary attendance. You'd be surprised at the percentage of employees that participate, even on their own time. The OLTs use either a conference call or a webinar format. The OLTs enable us to stay on top of industry developments and to make sure employees of all our locations are thoroughly versed in how those developments impact our business and our customers."

Driskell said, "As a child I lived a life mostly in poverty, but it was filled with the richness of experience. I lived in more than 35 places, including automobiles, garages and even a tent during two of my high school years. Combine that with both positive and negative life experiences, which even include a plane crash, make me who I am today and gave me the drive to succeed. After all - what more motivation do you need then to put food on your plate, clothes on your back and a roof over your head?" All of this has culminated to make this self-proclaimed Tennessee boy a success in both his professional and personal life, evident by his 19-year marriage to his wife Debbie. Working from the age of 14 and on his own since 15, Driskell had many jobs. "From bus boy to timeshare sales, I think I've about done it all. But my love was always in managing people and processes." He got into the roadway safety industry by simply answering an ad in the newspaper for a job with a striping company. He ended up as general manager for the company in West Palm Beach, Fla. in the contracting end of the business.



PPP employees attend a teaching session



PPP employee Brian Tebo (Regional Facility Manager) guides customers with proper field application technique.

During his tenure, the contractor expanded to include a supply arm, and Driskell had found his niche. Other than finding that he just liked the supply more, he chuckled, "There's also a lot less ways to lose money in the supply side."

Describing himself as a 'middleman,' Driskell stresses the

importance of providing a valuable service for both his vendors and his customers. "As a middleman, our job is to find products for our customers and customers for our vendor's products". Driskell puts a lot of emphasis on importance of his vendor relationships. No wonder, since it was a special vendor relationship turned to partnership that created PPP. It was long-time vendor turned friend Al Brode that financed the startup. "This innate appreciation I have for my vendors is one of the reasons we need our employees to really understand our products and industry inside and out. As part of our service to the vendor, we must have the knowledge and confidence to make the initial determination if a problem in the field is application or product related. If it's an application issue, we need to be able to advise our customers how to solve it and get things moving on the job site again. If we feel it could be a materials issue after a thorough investigation, our vendors know and trust our experience and expertise. When we call, things move very fast, and they can quickly address the problem before it becomes more widespread and involves more customers. It's a lot easier and less expensive to fix a problem when it's small."

Driskell has spent a lot of time and effort in developing a very successful business model, and he quickly saw an opportunity to expand that and put it to work for him in other ways. "There are lots of folks out there who have great new products and ideas, both in the U.S. and abroad, but they just don't have the business infrastructure to make them viable. Our overall business model has been adjusted to meet this need. We can offer select components or a full-service product 'development to distribution' process. As an example, our sales and marketing offer includes developing all the promotional materials: videos, product promotional workshops, web presentations, face-to-face and telephone sales - anything and everything the company needs to promote their product - all at no upfront cost to them." Through these ventures and the tremendous growth they've experienced, they are a member of the elite Inc. 5,000 - one of the top 5,000 companies in the country in growth.

"We find that our membership in professional associations, including ATSSA, to be extremely helpful in doing business," says Driskell. He speaks very highly of his experiences with the association. "I've been an active participant in ATSSA for 13 years. I currently serve on both the Foundation Board of Directors and chair the national Membership Committee. ATSSA has also provided payback for my investment and participation. Everyone should attend the Fly-Ins. They brought me to a much greater understanding of how our government really works. ATSSA has also improved my leadership skills - attending multiple Leadership Training Courses over the years was just incredible. It taught me how to be a better leader, which up until then I was trying to learn by trial and error. My subsequent board and committee experience has taught me how to build consensus - rather than how it was in my companies where I always get the final decision. I've gotten better insight by attending and participating in local and national meetings. ATSSA gives our members and industry recognition, and more recognition means more influence. It's a great advantage to be a member of this association. And of course, many of my friendships are from ATSSA as well."



g seminar on retroreflectivity

Driskell's driving entrepreneurial spirit eventually led him to go into business for himself in November 1996, his first office was his back porch. PPP has come a long way since then. They now have three regional distribution centers that serve regional areas covering an approximate 350-mile radius: Houston, Texas; Jacksonville, Fla. and Charlotte, N.C. The company also has branches that serve a local area of 75-miles: Orlando, Fla., Raleigh, N.C. and Miami, Fla. "We are designed to be

So where does PPP go from here? "We'll continue to be heavily involved with new product development," says Driskell. "I think you'll also see us continue to expand geographically - when conditions are right, we'll open more locations. One of our goals is to find more people and vendors we can provide services to. We'll also keep searching for the right companies and products that will enable us to obtain more national and international sales and marketing agreements. That will help us bring newly developed innovative products into the marketplace."

When asked if there was any one thing that most contributed to his success, Driskell said, "there are people who work harder than me, there are people who are better financed than me and yes, there are people smarter than me; yet they haven't reached the level of success we have. By this I truly believe that all I have received and achieved is ultimately by the grace of God."

And so the vision first imagined more than a decade ago has become a reality. Professional Pavement Products, Inc. - Products. Service. Knowledge.

- Locations:**
- Jacksonville, Fla.**
 - Orlando, Fla.**
 - Miami, Fla.**
 - Raleigh, N.C.**
 - Charlotte, N.C.**
 - Houston, Texas**