

Ryan Watts loves to talk about the people in his life. He is much more comfortable describing his mother's work ethic, great-grandmother's optimism or father's adventurous spirit than talking about his own attributes.

This is not surprising coming from a man who, according to co-workers, puts the welfare of others before his own interests. They also describe him as positive, caring, respected and someone who exceeds expectations.

These traits are just a few of the reasons why Watts, foreman for Jurin Roofing Services Inc., Quakertown, Pa., recently won *Professional Roofing's* annual Best of the Best Award, an extension of The Roofing Industry Alliance for Progress' Most Valuable Player (MVP) Awards. OMG Roofing Products Inc., Agawam, Mass., co-sponsors the award.

"I have been on the selection committee for seven years, and Ryan Watts was above and beyond expectations in every category," says Tim Rainey, president of Supreme Systems Inc., Dallas, and MVP Task Force chairman. "Ryan exemplifies our industry not only with outstanding job performance but also with his actions in the community and service to our country. As Ryan demonstrates, roofing workers don't just swing hammers; they are individuals contributing to our society in many ways."

COUNTRY LIVING

Watts, 30, grew up in Spinnerstown, Pa., which he describes as "country living." That lifestyle allowed him to spend as much time outdoors as possible.

"I was never home," he says. "I was out playing sports and riding bikes. I was a chubby little kid, but I was athletic and out playing all the time."

When he wasn't playing sports, Watts spent time with his mother's side of the family.

"We had a lot of family traditions," he says. "We had all the big Christmas, Thanksgiving and Easter gatherings and family reunions."

Watts was raised by his mother, Lori, and had a couple of stepfathers, stepsiblings and half-siblings growing up. He did not meet his biological father until he was 26 years old.

When Watts was about 5 years old, he learned his stepfather wasn't his biological father. After his mother and stepfather later divorced, the family moved into a motel in Quakertown, Pa., for a few months until Watts' mother and a friend rented an apartment in Spinnerstown.

A few years after Watts' mom remarried, when he was in eighth grade, the subject of his biological father resurfaced.

"My stepdad told me my mom knew where my dad was," Watts says. "I started searching his name and found his address when I was 18 but waited eight years before I decided to go see him."

A SELFLESS SPIRIT

Ryan Watts wins the Best of the Best Award

by Krista Berns



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Watts met his dad just before Watts' son was born, around Christmas 2009.

"I went to his house because my fiancée, Jen, and I were expecting, and we wanted a



full family medical history," Watts says. "So we jumped in the car and drove down to his farm—it was a quiet drive. He gave me a tour of the farm. He remembered my mom, and I told him he was my biological father."

After exchanging addresses and telephone numbers, Watts and his father had a paternity test done that confirmed they were father and son.

"It's been a really good relationship," Watts says. "I'm so glad I had the opportunity to meet him."

Through that relationship, Watts also has had the opportunity to meet extended family on his father's side.

"I went to England with my father to visit my great-grandfather," Watts says. "He is a World War II vet who escaped Austria and joined the British Army. He is amazing."

Watts also has learned he and his dad share many similarities, including a love of sports and motorcycles. And he sees himself and his father in his 4-year-old son, Bryce.

"When I was young, I was happy to play and be a part of something, and I see that in my son," Watts says. "He wants to kick the ball and chase things. I'm starting to see a lot of me in him."

Watts appreciates that his father can get to know Bryce.

"I didn't have a permanent father figure growing up, and now we have a son, father and grandfather," Watts says. "My son can get to know his grandfather. I took a canoeing trip with my dad in 2012, and it will be nice to be able to take those trips someday with my dad and my son."

"If it weren't for Jen and my son," he continues, "I probably wouldn't have met my dad or his extended family, including my great-grandfather."



Top to bottom: Watts (center) with Tim Rainey (left), MVP Task Force chairman, and Josh Kelly, vice president and manager of OMG Roofing Products Inc., Agawam, Mass., after Watts won the Best of the Best Award; Watts fishing with his son, Bryce; Watts works on a roofing project.

LEARNING THE ROPES

Watts' unconventional childhood helped shape his work ethic; he was 11 when he had his first job busing tables at a diner. Watts was waiting tables and delivering pizza in 2003 when a friend told him he worked for a great roofing company, prompting Watts to look into roofing.

"I worked for my cousin as a store manager for Domino's Pizza," Watts says. "I was working every day and not making much money. My cousin wanted to buy a store and wanted me to help manage it; he couldn't afford to pay me much, but I went with him to help him out."

After a year, Watts still wasn't making enough money and had to look for a new job. He found one at Jurin Roofing Services but remained at Domino's, maintaining a grueling work schedule.

Watts worked Monday through Friday 6 a.m.-6 p.m. at Jurin Roofing Services. Then, he would go to Domino's and manage the store Friday night until closing at 1 a.m.; open the store Saturday morning at 10 a.m. and close it Saturday night at 1 a.m.; open on Sunday at 10 a.m. and close at midnight; and then get up Monday for his roofing job at 4:30 a.m.

"I kept that schedule for a month or so, but I realized I was making more money Monday through Friday in roofing than I was for two weeks at Domino's before I took the roofing job," he says. "I was killing myself for nothing, so I left Domino's on good terms."

Watts says entering the roofing industry without any experience was like "joining a club and you don't know anybody."

"I had no knowledge of roofing, and during the first couple of days I was taught how to strip in seams," he says. "I excelled at that and began picking up on everything else. Guys would pull me over and teach me things."

"For me, it was easy to learn," he continues. "When you're doing the same thing every day, you can't get better training."

Watts quickly was promoted to foreman.

"He got pushed into the foreman position when the foreman quit," says Mike Bleiler, superintendent for Jurin Roofing Services. "He'd only been here for two years, so that is quite a step in commercial roofing."

Watts says he received guidance from the team of people who were at Jurin Roofing Services when he started.

"Ed Mullen, the first foreman I had when I started, made an impression on me," Watts says. "The team who has been here the longest—that core group played

a big part in guiding me and showing me direction. If it weren't for them, I wouldn't be where I am now."

GROWING INTO LEADERSHIP

Watts' move into a leadership role was a learning experience.

"I used to be a yeller, to a point where people would shut down and not want to say anything or do certain things so they wouldn't get yelled at," Watts says. "Now, I coach them and teach them how to do something the 'Jurin way.' I don't push them out of the way and do it myself."

Eric Jurin, chief executive officer and chief operating officer of Jurin Roofing Services, says he understood Watts early on because they share similar backgrounds.

"Ryan grew up being independent, and when I say he was independent—he was an island," Eric Jurin says. "He didn't think the world supported him. In the early years, he didn't have a concept of team or a sense of family. I also started young at being independent and not asking for help, so I understand him. When he was going through difficult times, I met him outside of work and we had some revealing conversations.

"He still has that 'I can do it all on my own' spirit, but now he can appreciate having a team around him," he continues. "He's realized he has to reach outside himself and seek the counsel of others, which offers a deeper sense of joy and appreciation. When you grow up as quickly as he did, everyone seems like an enemy in your life. As you grow older, you see how many people care about you."

Yvonne Beck, human resources and accounting manager for Jurin Roofing Services, says Watts has come a long way.

"He was in his young 20s when he started, and now he has that 30-something maturity," she says. "He doesn't think he's perfect and asks for help when he needs it. He has matured into an excellent example of up-and-coming leadership and exemplifies everything that is professional."

His maturity has translated to quality roofing work. Watts has the distinction of getting a Perfect 10 on every one of his jobs through Carlisle SynTec Systems' Perfect 10 rating system, which recognizes and rewards superior Carlisle SynTec Systems single-ply installations.

"I feel that's quite an accomplishment to have," he says. "I have minimal punch list items and constantly bring the job in under hours."

Eric Jurin compares Watts to a Harrison Ford or John Wayne character.

"He's stern but has that moral compass he's always sensitive to," Jurin says. "He's always trying to do the right thing and lets people know that's how his decisions will be made."

EMBRACING TECHNOLOGY

Watts also has been a leader regarding Jurin Roofing Services' use of technology.

"It's difficult for a lot of guys who aren't experienced with technology in our industry to embrace it—especially the older generation," says Dave Rose, operations team leader for Jurin Roofing Services. "Watts embraces everything and is adept at it, and he encourages people who work with him to embrace it. He knows how to use it and thinks about how it can improve his job."

Watts recognizes the value technology can offer in the roofing industry.

"New technological aspects can improve productivity not only in the field but in the office, as well," Watts says. "By implementing new programs throughout the company, we can cut costs and free up time to be able to focus on other tasks. We have almost all the equipment out there to do the physical roofing work, and we always are looking for new ways to better our operations."

Watts says the most valuable technology he uses in the field is his iPad, which he uses for administrative tools, documents, training videos, weather tracking and much more.

"It provides me with almost unlimited resources at my fingertips," he says. "My iPad allows me to be more productive in pretty much all aspects of my job except the physical removal and installation of roofs. By allowing me to complete tasks quicker, it allows me more time to be able to coach and train my team every day."

TOUGH BUT FAIR

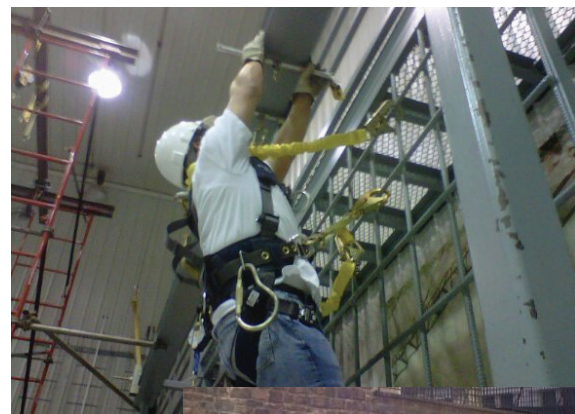
As Watts took on more responsibility at Jurin Roofing Services, his ability to oversee crews was important.

"This generation is different," he says. "Some of them feel entitled to not have to work, which can make it harder than ever to guide them in the right direction. In my generation, you busted your hump to make money



ON the WEB

For more information about the Best of the Best Award and for a list of past winners, log on to www.professionalroofing.net.



Top to bottom: Watts attends a fall-protection training course at Capital Safety, Red Wing, Minn.; Watts with former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani on Sept. 11, 2010.

and prove yourself before getting rewarded. Now, it's hard to find good workers. They think there's no need to excel—they just need to get by."

Watts typically looks for fast-paced, responsible workers.

"I want someone who gets here on time, has common sense, is good with his or her hands and doesn't mind getting dirty once in a while," he says. "That's the minimum. In the roofing industry, there is so much you can learn and excel in as long as you have determination."

Chris Jurin, president of Jurin Roofing Services, says patience is one of Watts' greatest attributes as a leader.

"A great leader must be patient with those he is leading and the progress they are making," he says. "His crew respects him because Ryan takes the time needed to help his crew understand what skills and abilities it will take to complete the project successfully."

However, Watts still demands hard work from his crew members.

"He works hard and expects others to, as well," Eric Jurin says. "But he's not someone who leaves people behind; he takes the time to help people as long as they're willing to help themselves. He's also sensitive to people with outside interests and works with their schedules."

Eric Jurin says Watts leads by example.

"He tries to do the right thing every day," he says. "He doesn't make excuses. He sets real goals, which is something crews appreciate because they want to succeed, as well. There are days that are long, and he remains with the crew until the end of those long days."

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

Watts tries to do the right thing with customers, as well.

"He's sensitive to their needs," Eric Jurin says. "They realize he's listening and not just giving lip service."

Watts says he started learning about customer service when he was young.

"I grew up in the customer service world," he says. "I was at the forefront of customer service when I was working at Domino's. It was instilled in me to keep customers happy."

He says his positive, straightforward attitude with customers is just common practice.

"I don't even realize what I'm doing," he says. "It's like a reflex. I have open communication and make time for the customer. I always want to right the situation and satisfy the customer."

Chris Jurin says Watts represents the company well.

"He is able to offer leadership through projects when the circumstances are difficult and the client is unsure," he says. "Ryan creates an environment that remains focused on the solution for the problem at hand and does not become distracted by the emotions that may be at play when the situation is unfolding."

In fact, Watts says dealing with customers is his favorite part of the job.

"I enjoy interacting with our clients and being able to build and maintain good relationships year after year," he says.

FINDING BALANCE

Watts tries to keep his work and home lives separate.

"I refuse to let work and home mingle," he says. "I'm a true Gemini—one person at home and one at work. At home, I'm easygoing and mellow. I try not to overbook myself. Work is about production, and home is not."

Outside of work, Watts likes to ride motorcycles, relax and spend time with his family—especially his fiancée, Jen, and son, Bryce. Watts and Jen plan to marry Memorial Day weekend.

"Jen is the best friend and mother anyone could have," Watts says. "She is supportive, strong and a great listener. She has been my rock during the past seven years. She put up with me working out of town for weeks at a time while she basically was a single working mother, doing everything while I was gone. I don't think I would've made it this far if it wasn't for her not giving up on me."

During his free time, Watts also finds time to be a volunteer firefighter.

"I've been doing it for more than 16 years," he says. "I'm a lieutenant this year, so in my free time I do training and take continuing education classes."

Watts recently was awarded the Liberty Mutual Insurance Community Service and Public Education Firemark Award for his volunteer work with the Milford Township Fire Department in Milford, Pa. The award is presented to firefighters who best represent their communities by demonstrating courageous valor and a firefighter's selfless spirit.

Watts was nominated by a fellow firefighter for the award because of his "everyday self-sacrifice and tireless



Top to bottom: Watts with his fiancée, Jen; Watts has a love for motorcycles.

efforts to protect and promote public safety in his community.” Watts teaches community fire prevention at local schools and headed his department’s role with Operation Safe Home in Bucks County, Pa., which involved finding older homes and low-income areas in the local response area that may not have working smoke detectors.

“We went door-to-door to check smoke detectors,” he says. “We found many houses with missing or broken smoke detectors. We installed new ones and got rid of the old ones.”

Watts has participated in fundraisers for the fire department, such as carnivals, Bingo and photos with Santa—an idea he implemented. He also serves on a board for the Engine-911 Foundation.

“After 9/11, our local fire department formed relationships with firefighters in New York,” he says. “There was a story about a firefighter who perished in 9/11, and he had planned to restore an antique fire truck. The truck sat there for more than a year, covered in debris—a homeless guy was living in it.”

So Watts and other firefighters decided to restore the truck and return it to the fire station, where it was deemed Engine-911 and makes periodic trips for memorial services and youth events. The foundation works to inspire all who see Engine-911 and educate the public about firefighters’ heroism.

“The Engine-911 Foundation celebrates the bravery of America’s firefighters and spreads the word about firefighters’ heroic acts on 9/11 so they will never be forgotten,” Watts says. “We go to New York every year on 9/11 for ceremonies and return to that firehouse.”

Watts’ giving nature extends to his home life, as well.

“When it comes to family and friends, if anyone needs anything, they can always come to me,” he says.

Although retirement is a distant reality for Watts, he has a few ideas about how he’ll spend his free time.

“I’ll be too old to be a career firefighter at that time,” he says. “I’ll ride motorcycles and vacation with Jen. I’ll become more active volunteering in the fire service. And I’ll spend time with my family—you can never have too much time with family.”

In the meantime, Watts likely has a bright future to look forward to in the roofing industry. Bleiler is training him to take over as superintendent.

“Mike says I’ll be superintendent in six years when he retires, but it may be sooner depending on how we expand,” Watts says.

Watts also can see himself getting involved with project management.

“My foreman position is broad,” he says. “I oversee safety at the job site, do preplanning—I’m basically doing project management. Every project gives me more experience.”

Eric Jurin sees even more in Watts’ future.

“I eventually could see him as part-owner of Jurin Roofing,” he says. “I don’t see it beyond him to one day own his own roofing company, if it’s not this one. When we were at the 2014 International Roofing Expo,* he was walking me around the show floor and showing me all the new things. He takes ownership in things, and he conducts himself that way.”

GIVING 100 PERCENT

When the impressive stories of MVP finalists were being read onstage during NRCA’s Awards Ceremony and Cocktail Reception, Watts didn’t believe he would win the Best of the Best Award.

“I could feel my heart beating out of my chest,” he says. “It felt like it took them 20 minutes to read my story. I was blown away, humbled and shocked that I won. To receive that recognition is surreal. It is truly an honor to be selected and win that award.”

Chris Jurin says Watts’ willingness to work hard and improve his skills helped him win the award.

“Ryan was chosen as Best of the Best because he exemplifies an individual who takes full advantage of the opportunities available in our industry for those who are willing to commit to learning and growing their technical and leadership skills,” he says.

Eric Jurin praises Watts’ ability to balance his life.

“He’s a balanced personality,” Eric Jurin says. “He averages more than 50 hours a week—60 to 70 some weeks—but finds time for family and the fire company and plays a great role, which is not easy in this day and age. He’s earned a lot of respect.”

Rose says Watts’ commitment to his life—at work and outside of work—is commendable.

“Winning the award really meant something to him,” Rose says. “He’s such a positive person. He gives 100 percent, and that translates to his overall life and why he got the award.” 🌟🔧

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Top to bottom: In his free time, Watts is a volunteer firefighter; Watts with his son, Bryce

For articles related to this topic, see:

“The educator,” April 2013 issue

“Committed to excellence,” April 2012 issue

“Recognizing the extraordinary,” April 2011 issue