



## SMALL BUSINESS

# Makers of Racquet Ball Courts Are Smashing Success

By David Yawn

A MEMPHIS-BASED SMALL BUSINESS was at center court in more ways than one during the recent U.S. Open Racquetball Championships here.

That's because the Court Co. custom designed and constructed the spectator court for the event at the Racquet Club of Memphis. What makes their court unique is that it's the only made-for-TV portable racquetball court in the world and it was premiered at the Memphis games.

The 15-member company, located at 5605 Murray, is led by Mike Mattingly and Randy Stafford. It has this special-

“We're the only company in the world that only builds racquetball and squash courts.”  
— Randy Stafford

ized field mapped out from front wall to back wall.

It offers turnkey racquetball and squash courts, including the walls, ceiling, maple floors, glass playing walls, doors and lighting systems.

Some of Court Co.'s designs and constructions are for health club chains nationally and for celebrities' homes. Country star Garth Brooks has one in his home.

The company has put together a number of racquetball courts for clients in Greece, Japan and Korea and at many military installations worldwide. It even builds courts for cruise ships.

And with 8 million racquetball players in the U.S. alone, future business seems a sure thing.

The Court Co.'s full-time installation



Mike Mattingly and Randy Stafford Outside One of the Permanent Courts Their Company Built at the Racquet Club

crews are skilled in all facets of this kind of construction, eliminating the need for additional subcontractors.

Panels are made from plastic laminate applied to both sides of a core with tongue-and-groove machining for an exacting fit. The laminate facing resists damage during play and can be wiped clean with detergent when needed.

Because of the structural steel studs used, the walls and ceiling are self-sup-

porting, Stafford says. This allows the courts to be constructed side-by-side, sharing common walls and saving space and materials.

The company was founded in 1976 by its present owners. Stafford played on the racquetball pro tour while in college and wrote a book on the sport while attending the University of Memphis.

“Mike and I were college classmates and business graduates of Memphis

State and started (the company) right out of college,” Stafford says.

“The first couple of years, we handled sales and construction ourselves right in the middle of the racquetball boom. It was hard for us to participate in the larger explosion, because we really didn't have money to operate (at that time). We finally grew our company and hired crews. We've actually kept the same crews over the years, which has helped our company tremendously.

“Since that time, we've built over 3,000 courts worldwide in 20 years,” Stafford says.

“We're the only company in the world that only builds racquetball and squash courts,” he says.

Racquetball, which was first played in Connecticut, has long been a favorite sport in Memphis.

Many of the courts first used for racquetball around the country were originally designed for handball.

Stafford has played the sport for more than 23 years, giving him expertise in evaluating the playing characteristics of a court and incorporating the best materials, he says. He's involved with all aspects of The Court Co., but concentrates in the sales area.

Mattingly is primarily involved in all phases of court construction, from design to finishing work.

“We're smart enough to stick with what we know how to do the best,” Stafford says. §

## Quality Can Be the Reward for Careful Job Screening

By David Yawn

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN good word-of-mouth advertising and a failing business? Usually, your own employees.

They are the ones who make the difference and who are often crucial to the success of a small business, says Jonathan E. Turner, managing director of Wilson & Turner, Inc., in Memphis.

So how does a sole proprietorship or small company ensure quality employees?

“The answer lies in properly screening your applicants,” he says.

Many small business owners are under the impression that employee screening requires either too much time or too much money, both often in short supply. However, you can quickly and easily perform a basic screening of applicants yourself, he says.

Pre-employment screening is simply a fancy term for ensuring that you are getting what you're paying for, before you buy it.

“You as the employer have the right to hire good, qualified people to serve your customers,” Turner says. “In fact, in a competitive environment, it is often a requirement.”

By ensuring that applicants are who and what they say they are, you are establishing the foundation for an honest and ethical workplace, he says. Experience has shown that pre-employment screening reduces turnover figures — and improves customer service.

Start the process, Turner says, by using a complete employment application. While you can design your own, there are several good ones available at office supply stores. Either way, it should include:

- Prior employers (covering at least

five years)

- Job descriptions (not just titles)
- References

Instruct each applicant to complete the application. Reject any application that is incomplete.

With that information in hand, you can easily identify the best qualified, saving yourself the expense of wasting time on other applicants, he says.

Turner recommends that the applicant's employment history have no unusual gaps. Call all prior employers — speak to the supervisor or owner, not just another employee.

Ask prior employers to identify skills as well as strengths and weaknesses.

“By screening all prospective employees before hiring, you are able to prevent problems before they arise and make sure your customers are handled by the best possible employees.” §