

# HAMILTON-RYKER BEGINS THE NEXT

# 40 YEARS

Story by Bud Grimes

Photography by Trevor Ruskowski

>>> Wayne McCreight ('67) and Crawford Gallimore ('71) still answer their telephones when customers call The Hamilton-Ryker Company. Some find this surprising 40 years after these business partners started the successful staffing company headquartered in Martin. Both say that the key to Hamilton-Ryker's success is relationships, and talking with clients is one way they stay connected with customers in a business environment that embraces their services.

Hamilton-Ryker includes commercial and information technology divisions with some 25 offices in seven states and Washington, D.C. The commercial division provides workers to factories, offices and other businesses and industries, while the information-technology division places high-level computer engineers and specialists in the banking and insurance industries and the federal government. These latter placements come with high security clearances because of Hamilton-Ryker's work with

the Pentagon, the U.S. Senate, the Department of Homeland Security and other government agencies. "The bigger part of the business now is the commercial, but the fastest growing is the information technology," Crawford said.

The company began in 1971 when Wayne sold an existing business interest but wanted to remain in sales and continue to live in Weakley County. He determined the way to accomplish this was to begin his own staffing business, which led to his opening the West Tennessee Personnel Agency. When Crawford joined the company the following year, they decided to change the name to one that didn't limit the company geographically. One marketing company recommended that each owner select a name and then separate the words with a hyphen. Wayne chose "Hamilton" for Alexander Hamilton, the nation's first secretary of the treasury, whose image is on the \$10 bill. Crawford chose "Ryker" from the character that appeared in his favorite TV show "The Rookies." Thus, The Hamilton-Ryker Company was born.

In the early days, each took shifts operating the business so they could hold down a second career. Wayne farmed in the mornings and worked afternoons in the office. Crawford worked at the business in the mornings and sold life insurance the remainder of the day. "All we were trying to do was trying to feed our families," Wayne said. Both were raised in rural farming communities, Wayne in north Shelby County and Crawford in Henry County.

"WE HAD A DESIRE  
TO BE SUCCESSFUL,  
AND WE WERE  
TENACIOUS –  
NEVER QUIT NO MATTER  
HOW HARD IT GOT –  
AND IT GOT REALLY  
HARD AT TIMES."

–Wayne McCreight ('67)



HAMILTON  
CORPORATION  
WELCOME



Crawford Gallimore, left, and Wayne McCreight have seen The Hamilton-Ryker Company begin as a staffing business and evolve into a national company experiencing significant growth in information technology and management. The client list now extends to the highest levels of government, including responsibility for network security at three Department of Homeland Security facilities.

Work responsibilities came first, and this upbringing instilled a strong work ethic that has contributed to their success.

Wayne attended UT Knoxville his freshman year, then transferred to Martin, where he graduated with a bachelor's degree in physical education. He was active in the Pi Kappa Alpha fraternity and involved in intramural sports. This love of sports evolved into a 37-year-long sports officiating career as he began calling high school football in 1974. He started officiating collegiate football in 1986 in the Gulf South Conference and then moved in 1990 to the Ohio Valley Conference. After retiring from NCAA officiating in 2007, he has continued his collegiate association by conducting summer study sessions for his former colleagues. He became the supervisor for Northwest Tennessee High School Football Officials in 2007, has served on the Tennessee Sports Hall of Fame board of directors since

2003 and was the organization's president from 2008-2010.

Crawford, who was raised in a musically talented family and learned to play guitar at an early age, entered UT Martin as a freshman and graduated with a bachelor's degree in business. He was active in the Alpha Kappa Psi business fraternity and also played in a band he started in junior high school with his cousin, Byron, now a Grammy Award winning-record producer. He retired from performing in the late '70s when his wife, Nancy, was accepted to anesthesia school.

Hamilton-Ryker began as a head-hunting business and entered the temporary staffing business "quite by accident" in the late 1970s, Crawford said. A customer approached them with a project to handle supplemental staffing for a new West Tennessee plant. He said their response was, "Absolutely. What's supplemental staffing?" Through dedicated research and hard work, the temp

part of the business took off. Today, core activities such as payroll, risk management and worker's compensation are handled in the corporate offices in Martin. A regional office in Nashville houses marketing, sales and other operational functions for the company.

Current challenges involve working with state governments where the company does business, as well as dealing with different laws regarding business, employers and employees. This is also one of the most rewarding aspects of the business as the company was selected to provide security staff for the World Equestrian Games held last fall in Lexington, Ky. The World Equestrian Games, a 16-day event considered the Olympics of the horse industry, was attended by more than 500,000 visitors from 63 countries.

Significant growth in information technology services and management is creating a national reputation and increasing market share for



Hamilton-Ryker's IT business. The company website describes projects ranging from security and documentation work with the Department of Defense's Washington Headquarters Services to improving operating efficiencies for "the largest supplier of health-care coverage in Alabama." The company's client list extends to the highest levels of government as Hamilton-Ryker reworked the IT network at Camp David, the presidential retreat in Frederick County, Md., and is responsible for network security at three Department of Homeland Security facilities, Crawford said.

Diversity enables the company to weather fluctuating economic cycles, including the current recession, the fifth experienced by Hamilton-Ryker. Communication and mutual respect for each other, and rapport with clients and employees, are other keys to business success. Each complements the other and brings balance to the partnership with essential assets and characteristics.

Both agree on the importance of hiring good people. "In business like in sports, the team with the best people is going to win, and our biggest challenge has been to find and maintain good employees, ..." Crawford said. "And when we look back at the errors we made, the vast majority of them always involved hiring or keeping the wrong people. And once we kind of figured out that combination of how to find the right people and keep them, things got much, much more predictable."

Both are actively involved with the business but have scaled back their day-to-day office time. Wayne's son, Kelly, who worked as a certified public accountant for Arthur Andersen before coming to Hamilton-Ryker, has been with the business for 17 years and is now company president. Crawford's son, Whit, came to the business three years ago and previously worked for Enterprise car rentals and the Tennessee Department of Labor.

UT Martin connections run deep as Crawford's wife, Nancy ('72, '75), graduated with a degree in nursing, studied further to become a nurse anesthetist and worked for 15 years at Volunteer

Community Hospital in Martin. She remains active through alumni events and her sorority, Alpha Delta Pi. Crawford also stays connected through alumni events and has served on the UT Board of Trustees since his appointment in 2008 by then-Gov. Phil Bredesen.

Wayne's wife, Diane ('68, '88), graduated with a bachelor's degree in education and then earned a master's degree in guidance and counseling. She is a retired schoolteacher and Career Ladder III evaluator. Along with Wayne, she continues to support the university through alumni events and through her sorority, Chi Omega. They own Benwoody Farm, where Wayne and Diane raise purebred Black Angus cattle.

Even with other interests and responsibilities, both remain fully engaged with their growing company. Callers to Hamilton-Ryker are greeted with a telephone message that says, "The people you need when you need people." For Wayne McCreight and Crawford Gallimore, this is more than a slogan as they've built a successful business poised to begin the next 40 years as a leader in putting good people to work. <<<

Hamilton-Ryker has hired and retained employees in key positions, contributing to the company's success. Among those with significant company service are (l to r) Teresa Barner, accounting manager (22 years), Ladona Russom, human resources manager (11 years) and Michelle Morehead, payroll and credit manager (17 years).

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