

A LIFETIME *of* KEEPING COOL

Many teenagers work as lifeguards during the summer, but for Tommy Garner, TowneBank member and owner of Tommy Garner Air Conditioning and Heating, that job shaped the rest of his life. It introduced Tommy to maintenance workers, who in turn introduced him to the business of heating, ventilation, and air conditioning. "HVAC appealed to me because the work was interesting, challenging, well-rounded, and it incorporated many different skills and trades."



Tommy Garner enjoys the variety in his work as owner of Tommy Garner Air Conditioning and Heating.

Tommy cultivated that appeal into a state trade apprenticeship in HVAC, which he coupled with courses at Thomas Nelson Community College and ODU. He quickly established himself in the industry, working for local companies on everything from trains to Tomahawk helicopters.

In 1986, Tommy formed Tommy Garner Air Conditioning and Heating. Today, the company boasts nearly 30 employees and serves the entire Peninsula region, including Smithfield, Suffolk, Williamsburg and Gloucester. Tommy takes classes to keep up with the latest advances in technology and to ensure that his company remains a leader in an ever-evolving industry.

His key to success? Marketing the "old-fashioned" way. "We've never been in the yellow pages. The volume of our sales comes from word of mouth."

In 2007, that positive word of mouth led Tommy to provide electrical services for Sea Technology, a local marine power company. Not long after, the company was in need of an overhaul, and Tommy saw an opportunity to expand his local business presence in a field already familiar to him. Under Tommy's ownership, the SeaTech brand flourished, expanding to help innovate new products for the industry, serving marinas both locally and in places like Puerto Rico and the Cayman Islands.

Tommy and his wife, Chrissy, have been active with the Boys & Girls Club of the Virginia Peninsula. In addition to serving on their board, he donated HVAC services, a van, renovations to a Workforce Development Center, and a rent-free suite for the Tyler Avenue Boys & Girls Club.

Tommy also believes that TowneBank is the right place for his business. Before he joined the Towne Family, Tommy found banks to be his business' biggest obstacle. "In the time it took for another bank to approve the loan for my first building, we had already built it!" A connection with TowneBank executive vice president Susan Harris has helped Tommy grow his businesses in ways that would not be possible otherwise. "At TowneBank, it's all about professionalism," he says. "When you visit, you are greeted with a smile. They know your name and treat you with respect, like you're one of the team." ♦