



ICAA-Member Contractor

Ken Wells

**Elite Insulation LLC
Broadway, VA**

How would you describe the demographics of your business?

Our main office/warehouse is located in rural Broadway, Virginia. It is approximately 15 minutes north of Harrisonburg, one hour south of Winchester, and one hour west of Charlottesville. We also have a satellite office/warehouse located in Winchester, Virginia. Our service areas include a 120 mile radius surrounding our Broadway location and an 80 mile radius surrounding Winchester. The majority of our work takes place in the rural areas closest to these locations, but we also solicit business and offer service to our surrounding urban communities.

When we entered the insulation business 20 years ago, the largest portion of our business was new residential construction. Due to the current downturn in construction, we have seen a lull in new single-family residential construction and a spike in large-scale commercial work, multi-family residential, age-restricted retirement communities, and pre-existing home additions and renovations.

What is the history of Elite Insulation?

Our family became involved in the insulation business in the late 80's when my Dad, Bob Wells, was hired as the branch manager of a struggling insulation company in Winchester, Virginia. After seeing a large growth period, the original owners offered the business for sale. It was purchased, the name was changed, and Bob Wells continued as General Manager. My brother, Chris Wells, and I worked part-time installing insulation during our high school years. We both continued our part-time installing and began selling insulation as we attended James Madison University located in Harrisonburg. It was during this time that we realized the growth potential in the Harrisonburg market. In 2000 the business was officially expanded to Harrisonburg and I was General Manager. My brother Chris explored other job opportunities but rejoined the business a few years later as the General Manager of the newly opened gas fireplace division. Shortly after the expansion to Harrisonburg, the businesses were sold to an even larger corporation. All three of us were offered continued employment in our General Manager positions until 2007 when we jointly decided to leave this employment. After our separation, we

decided to embark on the challenge of starting our own businesses, Elite Insulation LLC and Poly Pro LLC. Although we have two names, for the purposes of sales recognition, we officially operate as one corporate entity, Elite Insulation LLC. Elite Insulation is our conventional insulation company, and Poly Pro is our spray foam company.

Elite is a family business. What family members have joined you in running Elite?

From the very beginning, Elite Insulation has been a family business owned and managed by Bob Wells, Chris Wells, and me. Chris's brother-in-law, Ben Caffo, who worked for me as an installer, has joined our company as warehouse supervisor/crew supervisor.

What distinctive services does Elite Insulation provide?

Elite Insulation LLC and Poly Pro LLC jointly offer a full line of fiberglass, cellulose, and spray foam insulation products and services. We offer a wide range of products and services for both new and renovation construction including conventional fiberglass/cellulose insulation, core filling block walls, foam filling steel columns, full-cavity fill open and closed cell foam, and our foam hybrid insulation (batt/foam) system. Our combined years of experience and our personal attention to each of our customers has earned us the reputation as "problem solvers" and the "go to" insulation company in our service areas.

What challenges do insulation contractors face in the current market?

Each insulation contractor has to closely review his or her own business and market areas; however, there are some fundamental business practices which are common to the survival of all companies. It is my opinion that in the current market contractors must put a laser beam on their labor cost, cost of goods, and their overall operating expenses. Additionally, in this down market it is imperative for contractors to implement a business plan which fits their market conditions and allows them to stay competitive without sacrificing profitability, quality, and service.

Has ICAA membership been a good resource for you as a contractor?

YES. My family has always felt that membership/participation in local, state, and national builders associations and membership/participation in our insulation industry organization is one of our most useful resources. Membership and participation in the ICAA have given us the venue to keep up with new products, new laws, current market conditions, and the opportunity to share ideas with other professional insulation contractors.

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Are there special insulation needs in the Virginia market?

Our state and our builders have definitely "Gone Green." Charlottesville, VA, is among the top five green building communities in the United States. EarthCraft Virginia is one of the more popular building-science, green-building systems (like LEED) in our state's green building industry. EarthCraft Virginia's insulation inspections are much more stringent than our local city and county inspections. The projects are closely monitored by EarthCraft inspectors. I have taken the EarthCraft certification courses, and by doing so our company is fully certified. We are currently working on two large EarthCraft projects and have completed many others.

Did the ICAA Convention and Trade show in Tucson meet your expectations?

Yes. My dad and I attended this year's convention leaving my brother Chris behind to oversee our business. We found it to be very informative and took full advantage of all the meetings.

What's the best business advice that you have ever received?

It's a quote: "You can't build a reputation on what you're going to do." — *Henry Ford*

What skills are a must in running an insulation contracting business?

Being able to communicate effectively and build relationships with our customers and our employees is critical to having a successful business. It is our responsibility to help our customers select the best insulation system for their project, while staying within their budget constraints but also offering the best return on investment. Once we are successful in building a relationship with the customer, we must then make sure that the customer's insulation needs are communicated to our installers so that our customer gets the best job possible.

Every day is different and every customer must feel that they are the most important. Organization, time management, and scheduling skills are also very important in the day-to-day operations of business.

How do you relax when you are away from the business?



During football season I like to go to James Madison University football games with my family — my wife Meredith, son Jackson, and daughter Taylor. In the spring and summer I enjoy golfing, camping, and fishing with my family and friends. 