

# RV PRO

For The RV Professional

## The Power Behind Furrion

CEO and founder Aaron Fidler talks about the journey that led to Furrion's success in the RV market.

### *Also in this Issue:*

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- 2014 Hall of Fame's Class is Diverse Group

# Oklahoma's RV Doc Takes on Tough Cases

Green Country RV Doctor succeeds by taking on challenging customization projects and by dedicating itself to customer service.

By Tamarind Phinisee

**T**hink radical and trendy home improvement – HGTV and RVs. Yes, that's right: RVs.

Then think Jim Hughes.

Hughes – owner of Oologah, Okla.-based Green Country RV Doctor – is fast becoming known for his out-of-the-box renovations and conversions of RVs, horse trailers and mobile units.

He says about 99.9 percent of his company's business comes from word-of-mouth, and attributes the growing interest in his company to the philosophy on which it operates.

“Profit is not the thing I go after. I

believe in building long-term relationships,” Hughes says. “And, it's cheaper to keep a customer than it is to go after a new one.”

That, he says, means doing well on jobs no matter how small they may seem, being willing to listen and adapt to customers' needs, and sometimes even taking a loss to make a customer happy.

That philosophy extends beyond Green Country RV's renovation and conversion business and into its service and sales departments. After all, while custom projects generate a buzz for Green Country RV, they only make up 15 percent of what the business does.

“A lot of shops charge customers for three or four hours of work even though they don't fix the problem,” Hughes says. “If you come to us with an issue, we're not going to charge you if we didn't fix anything. And what we find is that they'll be back.”

Apparently, the strategy is working well for his eight-year-old company, which now boasts \$1 million in annual revenues.

## Tackling Specialty Renovation & Conversion Projects

Over the past few years, Hughes says he's been approached by companies and



Jim Hughes (second from left) owns Green Country RV Doctor in Oologah, Okla., and operates the business along with his son Jimmie, wife Angela, and son Ean, from left. The company mostly handles repairs, but also takes on renovation and conversion projects.



Jimmie Hughes uses his dad's invention, the EZ-RV Mover (the yellow attachment), to move a pop-up trailer at the repair business.

individuals alike who want custom, one-of-a-kind renovations and conversions. His job, he says, is to give them what they want.

His creativity and talent have shown through in projects like the \$30,000 conversion of a cargo trailer into a Jim Beam rolling bar and education unit referred to as the Beam University. The conversion was done for spirits and wine distributor Republic National Distribution Co.

The four-month project, Hughes says, called for a complete gut of the interior and rewiring. The final product featured vinyl tile flooring, custom oak cabinets and LED lights throughout, as well as three TVs and eight speakers. Maker's Mark barrel tops were used to create foldup tables for the unit.

The project that's brought Hughes the most publicity, however, may be the new mobile unit for the Muscogee (Creek) Nation Division of Health. The \$300,000, seven-month project called for the complete gut and retrofit of a Monaco coach into a state-of-the-art, high-tech, green-friendly, energy-efficient, mobile hospital and disaster relief unit. The newly retrofitted unit is being used to address medical issues of people living in rural communities. Among other things,



it utilizes five solar panels and a Xantrex Freedom SW inverter that's designed to produce clean energy.

Hughes says a major component of this project involved providing clean power for the technology for doctors so they can serve their patients.

To meet Creek Nation's needs, Hughes collaborated with Vancouver-based Xantrex Technology. The inverter/charger system selected for the project, Hughes says, met the Creek Nation's needs for extremely clean AC power when the coach is running. When the coach is parked and has access to shore power, it automatically switches

to the incoming shore power to charge batteries and power downstream AC loads to ensure that the batteries aren't overcharged.

Working with Hughes on this project was a win-win for everyone, says Xantrex Marketing Manager Mitul Chandrani.

"When a business of the repute of Jim has so much faith in our products and service, there was no question of holding back," Chandrani says. "The other factor was the scope of the project – it was being used for community work. We have always believed in participating in programs that impact the well-being of people."

As a result of this collaboration – in



Green Country RV Doctor retrofitted this mobile unit for the Muscogee (Creek) Nation Division of Health. The \$300,000, seven-month project called for the complete gut and retrofit of a Monaco coach into a state-of-the-art, high-tech, green-friendly, energy-efficient, mobile hospital and disaster relief unit. The unit is being used to address medical issues of people living in rural communities. Among other things, it utilizes five solar panels and a Xantrex Freedom SW inverter that's designed to produce clean energy. Hughes says a major component of this project involved providing clean power for the technology for doctors so they can serve their patients.



Jimmie Hughes cuts a piece of trim for a camper in the cut room at Green Country RV Doctor.

which Xantrex sent a tech expert and a video crew to film the installation – Hughes' company received a major marketing boost.

"We use our partnership with Jim as an example in our marketing material," Chandrani says.

The partnership also resulted in the launch of a new social marketing program for Xantrex called "My Xperience," where users of Xantrex products in multiple industries share their stories on how Xantrex solutions play a part in their professional and personal lives.

**RV Repairs Are Business's Bread & Butter**

The bulk of the Green Country RV's business (55 percent) comes from general maintenance of RVs, such as fixing plumbing leaks and toilet problems, lights and electrical. Another 10 percent focuses on mechanical servicing of mobile units such as oil changes. The rest, Hughes says, comes from the repairs and maintenance of the rubber roofs and winterizing of RVs.

Electric awnings are one of the biggest areas of aftermarket sales for the company, followed by electric jacks.

Much of what Hughes and his team provides to his clients predicated upon serving

present and future needs, including tying in technological capabilities that are constantly changing.

“That’s the key to the industry. We’re living in a more energy-conscious society. Everything looks at whether there is cell phone, computer, and TV expandability. Is it going to be relevant tomorrow?” Hughes says. “Plus, anything you do has got to be aesthetically appealing.”

To stay current, Hughes says he looks at what’s trending online and in social media, he evaluates personal requests from clients and, of course, he receives feedback from his own employees.

The company’s employee roster consists of six talented and skilled full-time employees plus Hughes and his wife, Angela. Two of his employees serve as shop foremen – one each on the mechanical and electrical sides.

“I’ve built a team that allows us to do any build that I take on. For example, I



Jim and Angela Hughes work in the office of Green Country RV Doctor. It was Angela who came up with the company’s name.



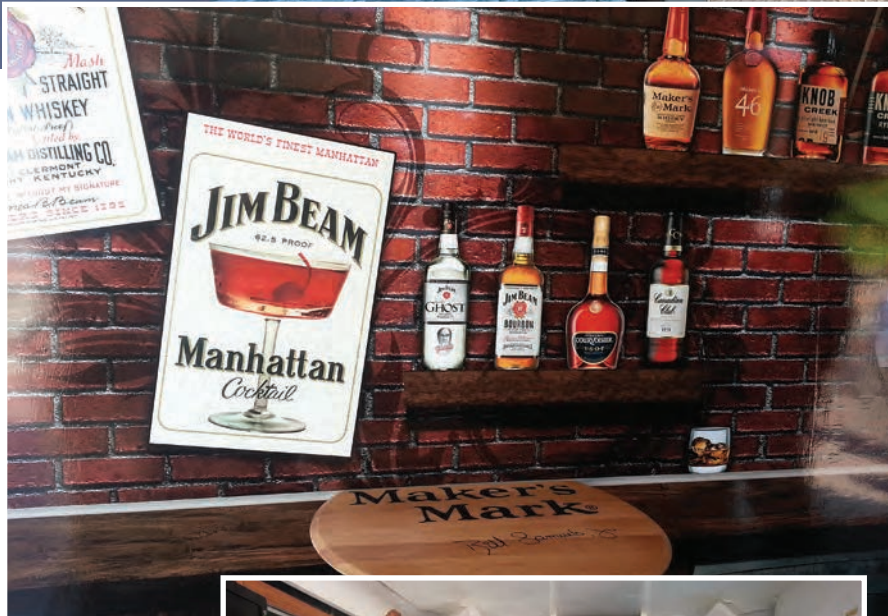
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As part of a \$30,000 special conversion project, Green Country RV Doctor took a basic cargo trailer and turned it into a rolling bar and educational unit promoting Jim Beam. The final product featured vinyl tile flooring, custom oak cabinets and LED lights throughout, as well as three TVs. Maker's Mark barrel tops were used to create fold-up tables for the unit.



have an electrician who can wire pretty much anything without a schematic. It just makes sense to him," he says. "A good manager doesn't know everything. Rather he surrounds himself with talented people." Hughes encourages his employees to get as much additional training and certification as they can by offering to reimburse them for tuition, provided they agree to work for him for a certain time. He also provides hands-on training, competitive salaries and benefits such as vacations.

In terms of what he looks for in potential employees, Hughes says one of the top criteria is having a good understanding of 12-volt wiring.

"In the RV industry, you work your brain harder than you work your body. And for that, you need thinkers," he says. "I train people to diagnose, evaluate, solve and then repair. This saves the customer and me money and it gets us more work."

Hughes and his team also give back to the community via the Collinsville, Okla., chapter of the Good Sam Club. Hughes is also a member of the RV Dealers Association.

### Changing Career Paths Pay Off

Before striking out on his own, Hughes worked in the tool and die industry and the plastics tooling industry for about 26 years. His decision to change career paths was prompted by the movement of more work overseas and his desire to work at a job he enjoyed and where he could control the company's direction.

He turned to the RV industry and went to work at an area RV company. Within 90 days, Hughes says, he'd learned everything he needed to know and decided to launch a mobile repair service in 2005. Some 18 months later, Hughes decided to build a two-bay service center on the family's 3-acre homestead to do more extensive repairs and conversions.

The repair business's growth hasn't stopped there. Just 18 months ago, Hughes acquired an RV dealership repair business, which sold used RVs and trailers and did minor repairs, just one mile north of his first shop. This acquisition has allowed Hughes to expand his services and has provided him with three additional service bays, an office, and showroom/retail space.

It was Hughes' wife, Angela, who came up with the company's name, Green Country RV Doctor. Hughes has worked hard to live up to the name by striving to be the best one-stop-shop for clients' needs – just as a country doctor would be for his patients. In that vein, Hughes taps into the talent of his staff and himself to offer as many services as possible. When he encounters an area he doesn't have knowledge in, he finds someone who does.

Enter Johnny Walker, founder of Tulsa, Okla.-based Tulsa Truck Auto & RV Repair. Walker – who met Hughes more than a year ago – has worked with Hughes on a number of projects including the Creek Nation mobile hospital. Most of what he does for Hughes is chassis-related.

"We're both in same industry, just on opposite ends," says Walker, a 30-year veteran in the industry. "He (Hughes) takes care of the coaches and I take care of what moves them down the road. I like the way he works and the way he does business."

Green Country RV Doctor offers RV sales, service, repair and parts. It also sells



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Technician Mike Suto works on a camper project. Green Country's employee roster consists of six talented and skilled full-time employees plus Hughes and his wife, Angela. Two of his employees serve as shop foremen – one each on the mechanical and electrical sides.

travel trailers, fifth wheels and mobile homes on consignment.

Currently, the company has two locations: a north and south shop. Together, these shops have approximately 10,000 square feet of service and retail space, including five service bays and office space. The south shop is the smaller of the two and is used for most of the company's custom projects.

Future plans are to expand the company's operations by constructing a 12-bay, 20,000-square-foot facility on 10 acres of land, just south of its current shops. This expansion will allow Hughes to consolidate most of his operations. Plans are to keep the north shop open for retail sales because of the company's life-long rental agreement there and the property's highly visible location.

These expansion plans, as well as the

hiring of additional employees, are predicated upon the company landing a large contract later this year.

Hughes says his desire for continued growth has been tempered by his wife's fine management of the business's finances as the company CFO. "She's the one who reels me back in," he quips.

Initially, Hughes and Angela used their own savings to fund the business. They did not take a salary for two years, instead putting the money back into the company. Over the past eight years, the Hugheses have invested about \$750,000 of their money into the company.

### New Growth Opportunities in LED Lighting

Because Hughes encourages growth, learning and new ideas, his employees – some of whom are motorcyclists –

An advertisement for the RV Brake Towed Battery Charger. The top half features the headline "I got the POWER!" with a lightning bolt icon. Below it, text states: "The Towed Battery Charger installs in less than 15 minutes, and keeps the towed vehicle's battery charged." The central image shows a black, diamond-plate textured "Towed Battery Charger" mounted on a post. The charger has a "15 amp fuse" label and a "charging" indicator. It is connected to a motorhome and a towed car. The background is a scenic landscape with a motorhome and a car in a field. At the bottom, the RV Brake logo is on the left, and the text "Now Dealer Direct!" with the phone number 800.815.2159 and website rvibrake.com is on the right.

approached him with an idea for a new line of business: Tricking out motorcycles, hotrods, and mobile units with LED lighting. In true, out-the-box fashion, Hughes jumped at the idea and launched a new subsidiary, called Light Bike Technologies. The lighting system the company offers features up to 21 colors as well as several flash speeds and patterns.

The LED-accent lighting company specializes in motorcycles, but also does custom applications for just about any item. And, Hughes says, he's already had crossover business from RV and trailer customers.

"I was a little worried in the beginning because this couldn't just be a hobby; it has to make money, and it has," says Hughes, who is an avid Harley-Davidson motorcyclist himself. "We're an out-there company and I'm not afraid of trying anything." **PRO**



Mike Suto and Jimmie Hughes work on installing a window in a refurbished RV at Green Country RV Doctor. The bulk of the Green Country RV's business comes from general maintenance of RVs, such as fixing plumbing leaks and toilet problems, lights, and electrical. About 15 percent is customizing and remodeling RVs. Another 10 percent focuses on mechanical servicing of mobile units such as oil changes. The rest comes from the repairs and maintenance of the rubber roofs and winterizing RVs.

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\*Applies to Freedom HF inverter/charger

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### Freedom HF Series



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