

# **R & R Properties – a brief history of one family’s dream come true – Part 2**

**(As published in The Oak Ridger’s Historically Speaking column on July 21, 2009)**

In the first installment of our story last week Richard and Shirley Chinn of R&R Properties had just begun the process that resulted in the selection of Oak Ridge as the place they chose to live and raise a family. The analytical process they used was a thorough one. They did not act in haste or without evaluating their options.

As we note the details they both considered in the process you will understand part of what has made them such a great team and partners over the years. The decisions made over the years and still being made today in R&R Properties reflect this thorough and complete thought process. Richard and Shirley not only continue to practice excellent decision-making processes but have succeeded in passing on to their sons, Rick and Ryan, an intense desire for extensive review and exceptional decision-making.

As Richard and Shirley compared potential locations they identified those where there were no automobile body shops except for those that were part of automobile dealerships. They also identified those locations that were small towns close to larger metropolitan areas. There were two primary locations that seemed to fit the specifications. One was Macon, GA, and the other was Oak Ridge, TN. What a choice!

They looked closer at the two final towns. They compared the schools as Richard and Shirley were already considering starting a family of their own. High quality schools were important to them. This was in 1968 and their oldest son, Rick, was born in 1969. So, their timing was right on target.

Of course, they looked at several things when comparing Macon to Oak Ridge, but the schools scored high as did the beauty of the area. As they tabulated all the detailed comparisons and considered the pros and cons of the two cities, Oak Ridge won the competition. We citizens of Oak Ridge were then and remain today to be the beneficiaries of their detailed and comprehensive decision making process. If you have ever been to Macon you know they made the right choice.

What I recall about that area is having been stationed at Warner Robins Air Force Base and living in Warner Robins. It is just to the south of Macon and is right beside Peach County, GA, where the best peaches in the world can be picked right off the trees. In the late 1960’s when Fanny and I were there, it cost \$1 a bushel to pick them.

So, Richard and Ray formed their business know as “R & R Auto Body Shop.” You have by now guessed the two “R’s” in the name stand for “Richard and Ray.” To start their business in the town selected from an almanac and because it had many of the desirable things Richard and Shirley were looking for to raise their family, Richard arranged to rent space from Bobby Hurt in the old Hurt Building on Midway Lane.

The business really went well, indicating their research was right on target. Anderson County was ripe for a good automobile body shop. Oak Ridge was the right location for the business. Several workers were added to the payroll as the business grew.

By 1971, the business was going so well that Richard decided to buy out Ray and run the shop on his own. They agreed that Ray would not start another body shop in Oak Ridge or Anderson County, so he went to Knoxville and started another body shop there, which he still owns today. It is located on Western Avenue and is called Ray’s Body Shop. Richard and Ray remain good friends to this day and Ray has never even considered returning to California.

The R & R Auto Body Shop was the biggest body shop in Anderson County for over 20 years. Richard continued to add personnel as the workload grew. Shirley took over the bookkeeping for the business. It was a family business that continued to grow and prosper. They outgrew the location on Midway Lane and wanted to own the land where their shop was located rather than continue to rent.

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The property at the corner of Midway Lane and Mitchell Lane (97 Midway Lane) was available and they purchased their first property in Oak Ridge - the first of many pieces of property they have purchased over the years. This was in 1973 and by 1974 they had built a new building on their property and moved out of the rental location into their very own business location. They were proud of that move and the new facility brought even more business their way.

While the automobile body shop business continued to grow, Richard soon saw that real estate held even better prospects for growth opportunities. Their next purchase was in 1974 when the lots at 105 Mitchell Road were acquired. Ryan was born this year as well. So, their family was growing, the auto shop business was growing and Richard was expanding into real estate.

The growth in all business ventures proved steady and more property on Midway Lane was added to the family holdings. 101 Midway Lane was purchased in 1978. 40 New York Avenue (The Pantry) was also purchased in 1978.

The next purchase caused many heads to turn and even had people wondering if Richard had lost his mind. He bought a church building on the west end of Oak Ridge. I remember when that happened, it was in 1982, and I wondered what in the world is Richard Chinn thinking. You can’t turn an old church building into offices...well, he did and nice offices at that.

I can well recall seeing the brick going up on all sides of that old wooden church building. The building is a really nice location for the Department of Office public information offices and has served that function for a number of years. If you did not know the building’s history, you would never guess it was a refurbished church building.

This was the first building Richard converted specifically for offices. Soon, he was converting warehouses into offices in other locations where office space was needed, primarily to accommodate the needs of the Department of Energy contractors.

American Magnetics, a company that builds magnetic cylinders for Magnetic Resonance Imaging machines contracted with Richard to have him construct a building especially for them at 105 Mitchell Road in 1985. This was a major expansion of the Mitchell Road properties.

Three years later, in 1988, the warehouses on Mitchell Road were converted to offices for Department of Energy contractors. Y-12 had some space rented there and the Lockheed Martin Energy Systems Maintenance Program group used that space for a number of years.

By 1991, the auto body shop business, while still a viable business, had grown into a situation where Richard felt he was being limited by insurance requirements for repairs and the constant haggling with adjusters led to more frustration than he wanted to contend with. Besides, the numerous real estate holding and rentals he was managing were by now taking the majority of his available time and most of his energy.

A choice had to be made and the body shop was closed. This freed Richard and Shirley from the day-to-day activities associated with a retail business and allowed them to focus their efforts and give the business of renting office space their full time attention. With the properties on Mitchell Road full, the converted church building rented, they began to look for other properties to add to their office space rental business.

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The large building at 701 Scarboro Road was available in 1991, so they purchased it and immediately added substantial office and training room space to it. Again, Lockheed Martin Energy Systems was anxious to rent much of that space as their training facilities on site at Y-12 were limited and did not accommodate the increased amount of training being required.

In 1992, Rick joined the business, having just graduated from the University of Tennessee. While Rick worked all aspects of the business as he learned the ropes, he now serves in a role at R & R Properties that includes lease negotiation, space planning, public relations and community outreach.

Ryan joined the business in 2000 and like Rick he too worked all aspects of the business as he progressed through the necessary learning curve. During the first four years when Rick came into the business it doubled in size and again when Ryan came on board the business again doubled in size during his first four years in the job. Bringing them both into the family business provided the manpower for taking on more and more projects and managing them successfully.

The key to continued growth in a small family business such as R&R Properties relies on the flexibility of each family member, yet each one brings unique strengths and abilities that given time to form and mature seem naturally to take shape in the overall business strategy. Rick and Ryan have provided complimentary elements to Richard and Shirley to round out the business into the company they are all proud of today.

Next we will look with the Chinn’s at the future of R&R Properties and how that is tied up with Oak Ridge’s evolution as a community and small but vitally important city. The shared vision of the Chinn family brings potential for growth and development that is complimentary to the heritage and creativity that has historically been a part of Oak Ridge. They hope to see our city evolve yet retain its unique character.

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### **R & R Paint And Body Shop—**

Mayor A. K. Bissell cut the ribbon as R&R Paint and Body Shop opened in new quarters at 97 Midway La. last Friday. Next to the mayor is Mrs. Richard Chinn and Chinn, owner of the shop. The independent shop specializes in the rebuilding and painting of wrecked automobiles.

Mayor A.K. Bissell cuts the ribbon for the Chinn’s first R & R Paint and Body Shop

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The new and expanded R&R Paint and Body Shop