



Roger Benedict

RUGGS BENEDICT

A LOCAL FAMILY BUSINESS WITH A GLOBAL CONNECTION

by Connie Steiert

Photos by Mark Ridenour

Bud Benedict was the proverbial Jack-of-all-trades. In the farm community of early Brighton, Colorado, he cleverly learned a variety of trades to serve his neighbors' household needs. This intrepid entrepreneur not only established the neighborhood general store, carrying everything from house paint to TVs, he also learned to install carpets, measure and hang drapes and pull off any number of handyman tricks to help keep the farm houses up and running.

It was a fellow farming community boy that first introduced the Benedict family to the wiles of Vail. Former Vail Mayor and co-founder of Slifer Smith & Frampton Real Estate Rod Slifer and Bud had a long-established relationship which dated back to their years living in Brighton. When the nascent Vail began to blossom, and new commercial buildings started springing up around the valley, Slifer thought of his friend and convinced Bud to make trips to Vail to install carpet in those early 1960s buildings.

Seeing what Vail had to offer, Bud relocated his family to Vail in 1968. Initially, Bud opened a business very similar to what he had in

Brighton: a store that offered carpet, tile, drapes and appliances. But it didn't take this shrewd businessman long to realize that there were more profitable gains to be made in Vail's early boom in real estate and property management. His business acumen eventually led him to take over the then floundering development of the Antlers in Vail, finish the project, sell the units and start it on the successful path it remains today, dipping his toes in the waters of development as well.

At an early age, his sons learned some of Bud's resourcefulness, as they worked alongside him. And a lot of Bud Benedict's ingenuity and entrepreneurship must have rubbed off on one son in particular. Roger Benedict not only learned well how to install carpet and flooring, today he is the president and founder of one of the valley's longest established and most respected retail businesses: Ruggs Benedict in Avon. For more than 35 years, this family-run business has been supplying Eagle County homeowners and businesses with beautiful, high quality carpets, flooring and area rugs. This year, it was named Business of the Year by the Vail Valley Partnership, not

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only for being a leader in the industry in design and flooring, but also for its big-hearted commitment to its employees and the community of Eagle County.

After graduating from Battle Mountain High School (located at the time in Minturn) with a class of 26 students, Roger went away to college. But soon he was back, and back to installing carpets around town with his two brothers. The trio began calling themselves Ruggs Benedict. His brothers eventually moved away and pursued different paths. But Roger remained, drawn by the beauty of the valley, the endless outdoor activities it offered and a solid community, which proved a great place to raise kids. When his father went on to explore the real estate and property management business, Roger continued to sell carpets.

Daughter Mandy has followed in her father's footsteps, becoming an integral part of Ruggs Benedict 15 years ago. She recalls taking dinner to her father as a child while he worked non-stop on those early installation jobs. She can still picture with clarity her father hawking carpets out of their van, displaying carpet samples from their home garage and driving to Denver to pick up rolls of carpet, he would then come back and store in the garage until he could install them.

Roger was involved in many of the commercial ventures in Beaver Creek Resort when it was first established. In those days, the business was very seasonal. Everything had to be finished by Thanksgiving or Christmas, and the rest of the year he could relax and enjoy the great outdoors and his family. Roger recalls working on Spruce Saddle when the restaurant was being built in Beaver Creek. That now-gorgeous facility was a nightmare of a job for Roger and his crew. The project was behind schedule and the designer decided on a custom-loomed carpet milled in Georgia. The mill was only able to produce one roll of carpet per day, and Roger remembers the frenetic pace of driving to pick up a single finished roll, coming back to install it, then driving back down the next day to pick up the next finished roll. But, by working day and night, he managed to miraculously meet the Christmas opening-day deadline.

Another job was hilarious in retrospect, but also not so funny at the time. Roger and his crew were asked to install new carpet in a newly sold Lionshead condo over the weekend. But, no matter how hard they tried, the key they were given would not open the door. Finally jimmying the lock, they installed the carpet only to find out later it was the wrong apartment. The carpet was supposed to be installed in a look-a-like condo next door. Roger says, laughing at the memory, thank goodness for the multi-colored shag carpets of the day; the crew was able to rip out, and re-install the carpet without detection in the patching job before the new owners arrived on Monday.

The business continued to grow gradually, steadily, and the days of doing business out of the family garage ended. In 1984, Roger incorporated the business and officially took on the Ruggs Benedict moniker. The first Ruggs Benedict showroom opened just down

Nottingham Road from its current location. It was a 2,200-square-foot facility. In 1988, Roger added hand-loomed area rugs to his inventory of carpets.

In 1995, he moved the business to its current location along Nottingham Road in the former Columbine Storage building. The two-story building allowed Ruggs Benedict to have a showroom on the main floor and a storeroom above. Roger converted the second level last year to a showroom by moving the company's storage next door.

Today, Ruggs Benedict is known for its unsurpassed, high quality selection of flooring. With its affiliation with Carpet One, it carries numerous Carpet One carpets as well as Karastan, Ralph Lauren and Stanton carpeting. With the construction industry moving toward "green" building, Ruggs Benedict has taken advantage of the industry's natural foray into green design. Roger decided last year to add more 100 percent natural wool carpet, and now almost two-thirds of the carpets are wool compared to a 4 percent national average. "People want really good natural products when they can find them and if they are affordable."

And now is a better than ever time to purchase carpets. With the economy's downturn, Roger kept his shrewd eyes peeled, and was able to acquire great deals from manufacturers. Right now, the main floor of Ruggs Benedict's showroom is filled with roughly half-priced deals on excellent quality carpets.

RUGS FOR THE COMMUNITY

Part of the reason Ruggs Benedict was named Business of the Year this year was the company's devotion to area non-profits.

Roger estimates Ruggs Benedicts donates 40 to 50 area rugs a year to local fundraisers for auctions. The company has also started a donation program for carpet. When a client orders new carpet, Ruggs Benedict takes the room-size, reusable portions, cleans it up and gives it to Habitat for Humanity's Home Outlet store in Gypsum.



At Ruggs Benedict, a professional staff assists customers with high quality flooring, carpet and area rugs. The company's many contacts make for great deals as manufacturers seek to move product during the economic downturn.

With the current trend of installing hardwood in common areas, area rugs are in more demand than ever. The upper level of showroom allows Roger to show the company's fine rugs in the fashion he believes they deserve: hanging to show each rug to its best advantage and to allow customers to fully view each rug. "One of the things that really annoys me," he explains, "is seeing piles of area rugs."

Years ago, Roger became acquainted with a dealer named H.C. Pace out of Steamboat who taught Roger a lot of the ins and outs of the carpet industry. He also introduced him to a man named Tufenkian who represented a line of area rugs created in traditional, hand-loomed fashion in Nepal. Along with producing exquisite rugs from local labor, Tufenkian in return provided the his employees with housing, education and medical attention. Ruggs Benedict carries Tufenkian Tibetan rugs at reasonable prices, along with area rugs produced by the Amadi Brothers of Kabul, Afghanistan, and rugs made by tribes in southern Iran. "For me that's the neatest thing," says Roger, "knowing we are supporting local economies."

Ruggs Benedict also carries hardwood flooring from Columbia, Armstrong, Biltmore Estates, Mountain Lumber and imported hardwoods from Europe. Additionally, Roger recently acquired two loads of exquisite reclaimed hardwood flooring salvaged separately from the Yangtze River reclamation project, in China, and from former mills in the Carolinas.

One key to Ruggs Benedict's success is that it has remained a family-run business that values its employees. Along with daughter

Mandy, Mandy's older brother Josh was the store's accountant for 12 years, before he and his wife became missionaries in Nicaragua. Several employees of Ruggs Benedict have been there for 15 to 20 years or more. Known for its superb installation, the company has established an Installer's Program to train installers. Most carpet businesses hire independent subcontractors to install carpets, who get paid by a piece-work rate and try to complete as many jobs as they can in one day. Ruggs Benedict hires full-time installers and has 12 installers on staff so they can concentrate on taking their time and making customers happy. Says Roger, "It's part of our success."

Yet, the rewards of this enterprise might have been hard for a young Roger to imagine 35 years ago. When Roger was at a pivotal moment in college, trying to decide what career path he wanted to pursue, he went to a business management seminar at the University of Colorado geared toward the carpet industry. A quip the instructor made struck a chord with him: smart people go into the computer, real estate and money marketing industries. "If you go into the carpet industry, you get to be the smartest person in the dumb class."

Maybe. But any person who has been able to parlay a family knack for installing carpet into the well-known, well-respected and successful business that Ruggs Benedict is today is not just the smartest person in the dumb class – he's just plain smart. ♦

Ruggs Benedict is located at 810 Nottingham Road in Avon. For more information, call 970.949.5390.