



Brett Bigham, Monica Palma and David Evans of Texas Utility Engineering

Firm finds niche in fixing poles

To most people, a utility pole is, well, just a utility pole. But to David Evans and Brett Bigham, owners of Texas Utility Engineering Inc., those poles are the bread and butter of their company, Texas Utility Engineering Inc. [Full Story](#)



Cullen/Frost ends fourth quarter, year on profitable note

Cullen/Frost Bankers Inc. reported a slight reduction in earnings in the fourth quarter as the financial services company successfully navigated the challenging economy. Still, Chairman Dick Evans says the company benefited from strong deposit growth in non-interest income. [Full Story](#)

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BUSINESS PULSE SURVEY

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Unhappy America...

Article: Whitacre to keep GM chairman and CEO title

Not bad for the son of a train conductor from Ennis.



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San Antonio Business Journal - by [Catherine Dominguez](#)

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To most people, a utility pole is, well, just a utility pole. But to David Evans and Brett Bigham, owners of **Texas Utility Engineering Inc.**, those poles are the bread and butter of their company.

Since it was founded in March of 2006, the two men have steadily grown the company, which focuses on the poles and anything related to them, by working as a vendor for local and national companies like **AT&T Inc.**, **CPS Energy**, **Verizon** and **Time Warner Cable San Antonio**. But as the economy began to slip last year, the company hoped to just hold steady.

"We were concerned with the economy," Evans says. "We were just hoping to stay at a half a million (in revenue)."

Last year, however, the company pulled in over \$1 million to the surprise of both Evans and Bigham. The two attribute their success to controlling the company's growth, which helped keep a lid on debt, and providing quality work for their clients.

"It was quite a shock to us," Evans says. "We didn't think we would do so well. We actually paid off all our debt and we are starting 2010 debt free."

With nine employees, Evans says the company was able to purchase, in cash, four new company vehicles this year, complete with new branding on each of them.

"This is a nice position to be in," Evens says. "And it is our goal to continue to grow."

Boot-strapping a dream

Both Evans and Bigham worked previously with **Grande Communications** and **CPS Energy**, where they gained extensive knowledge about the telecommunications and electrical industries.

"We decided to go out on our own and it was a pretty risky thing to do," Evans says. "We didn't have much capital."

To get the company off the ground, both men invested \$2,000 each in order to hire an attorney to help author the company's articles of incorporation. Working out of Bigham's kitchen, the men began to market their small company.

Among the company's services are helping companies get the permits they need to install utility poles, storm damage assessment, engineering planning, drafting services, project management and, most recently, pole inspections.

"We hired one employee and took turns paying him," Evans recalls.

Texas Utility Engineering's first contract was with Time Warner Cable San Antonio and that helped the company get through its first year. But both Evans and Bigham knew they needed to diversify and expand if the company was going to survive.

The company began expanding its client list, and in 2007 and 2008 had revenues just over \$500,000 both years.

Evans says 2009 has been the company's best year, adding that it is due, in part, to the fact that the company works in both the electrical and telecommunication fields while

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Small is better

Helping shape the company's client list were several contacts Evans and Bigham made while working with Grande and CPS. Tim Cole, manager of OSP Engineering and Construction at Houston-based telecommunications company **Alpheus Communications**, says making the decision to contract with Texas Utility Engineering made sense.

"They do all my permitting in the Austin and San Antonio area," Cole says. "They work in a timely manner and within the price I'm looking for too."

Cole says the fact that Texas Utility Engineering is a small company was another reason he wanted to work with them.

"I used to have my own small company myself," Cole explains. "And I think it is a better way to get that personal touch, that is what I did with my customers. With a larger company, you sometimes get lost in the shuffle."

Larry Powell, engineering manager at Brackettville-based **Rio Grande Electric Coop**, says he too likes the idea of working with a small company.



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"The are a small company with very experienced personnel," Powell says.

Powell says his company works with the military and is often put under tight deadlines. He says he is able to call Texas Utility Engineering and they are able to mobilize quickly to help get the job done.

Looking ahead

In the next year, Bigham and Evans have plans to expand the company's pole inspection division, incorporating a new technology that helps preserve the

integrity of the utility poles.

"You can't see inside a pole," Bigham says. "So you need some sort of mechanism to do that."

Older methods, Bigham says, entail drilling holes into a pole to place a probe to test the pole. After numerous tests, the pole's integrity is challenged because of the holes.

The Resistograph Technology is the most advanced testing method available today. Using a mircobit, the Resistograph System measures the resistance of the wood. The process helps to identify cracks, voids, cavities and decay inside the pole without leaving large holes in the pole.

According to Evans, the technology is the most accurate and reliable testing method and even allows for the testing of poles encased in concrete. With the new method, Evans says Texas Utility Engineering hopes to pick up some momentum this year with their pole inspections.

"Companies love the technology," he says.

"It definitely has a wow factor," Bigham adds.

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