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# COMING UP ROSES

*Rough Brothers specializes in well-designed, high-quality greenhouses, garden centers and conservatories backed up with good customer support and customer service. —ERICA BURKE*

**R**ICHARD REILLY, PRESIDENT OF ROUGH BROTHERS, is quick to point out his firm is not a collections agency headed by hard-nosed male siblings. No, Rough Brothers – pronounced “row” – specializes in a more attractive business: the design/build of greenhouses for commercial, institutional, conservatory and retail garden applications.

Rough Brothers offers these customers a comprehensive range of services, he says, including support during the project planning and development stage; full design and engineering services; planning and design for heating, ventilation and control systems; and project and construction management services.

In addition, Rough is fully staffed with experienced field crews to provide both complete installation and on-going service, the company says.

Now more than 70 years old, the company’ longevity

stems from focusing on high-quality products, Reilly says.

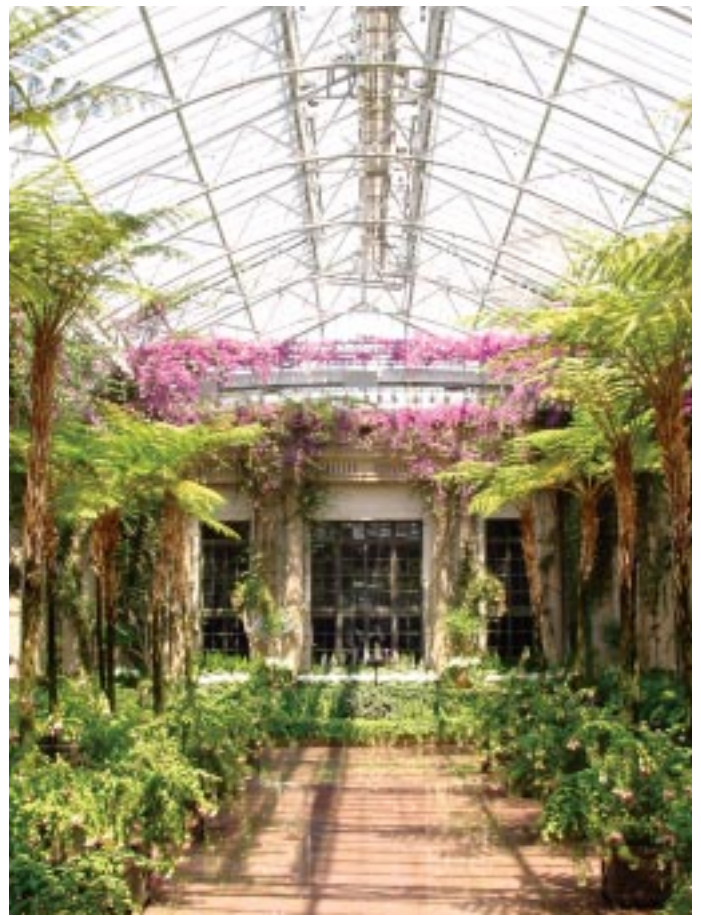
“We’ve never done much advertising, but over the years, we’ve garnered a reputation for providing a quality product with good customer support,” he says.

Rough started as a greenhouse maintenance company in the early 1930s and over time added design, engineering and manufacturing operations. “At the end of the day, we deliver a very durable and well-designed, high-quality product,” Reilly says. “And we back it up with very good customer support and customer service.”

It has earned a reputation among large national retail chains, commercial growers, colleges and universities, governmental agencies such as the USDA and corporations such as DuPont and other seed companies with major R&D programs. ▷

## PROFILE

**Rough Brothers**  
[www.roughbros.com](http://www.roughbros.com)  
**Headquarters:** Cincinnati  
**Employees:** 140  
**Products:** Greenhouses  
**Richard Reilly, president:** “Our vision is to be the leading greenhouse manufacturer in North America and, eventually, the world.”



▷ “Our long-standing reputation for superior quality at Rough Brothers is something we are proud of,” Reilly says. “We are proud to be able to meet the diverse needs of universities and schools, research facilities, retail garden centers, commercial growers and conservatories.”

### **Challenging Projects**

THE U.S. BOTANIC GARDENS IN WASHINGTON, D.C., WAS A MAJOR milestone project that included both extreme challenges and great accomplishments for Rough, according to Reilly. The 100-year-old structure closed in 1997 for four years to undergo extensive renovation and reconstruction. Rough was present from 1999 to 2002. At \$8 million, this project was Rough’s largest project ever.

“We designed an entire custom glazing system to replicate structures built 100 years ago with a combination of wood, steel and aluminum,” Reilly says. “We had to do this restoration with architectural integrity and so it would be a low-maintenance and long-lasting structure. Our challenges were not only design and engineering related, but logistical. The Mall in Washington ,D.C., where the U.S. Botanic Garden is located is right next to the nation’s Capitol and is a very tight site.

“Despite its challenges, the U.S. Botanic Garden has been a fantastic project to be affiliated with.”

Highlights of the project include the Garden Court, Orchid House, Jungle House and the Garden Primeval. There are 4,000 plants displayed at the U.S. Botanic Garden.

Although the greenhouse business has historically been slow to adopt innovation or any type of change, change is in the air.

“About 10 to 15 years ago, there were two types of greenhouses – plastic or glass, offered in a few different sizes,” Reilly says. “It has become a custom, engineered-to-order business.”

He says all Rough greenhouses are custom designed, fabricated and installed per the customers’ specifications. “It’s not that we come out with new products every year; but every project we do is new and different,” he says. “We went from a very standard product line to very specialized, innovative products.”

Rough has also made a significant investment in design and engineering in the past decade. “When I started, we had five designers and one engineer,” he recalls. “Today, we have 24 designers and five engineers. The investment has been phenomenal – we’ve quadrupled our design and engineering resources.”

### **Overcoming Challenges**

LIKE OTHER MANUFACTURES, ROUGH IS FACED WITH GLOBAL competition, Reilly says. “Twenty years ago, it was good enough to be the best greenhouse manufacturer in the Midwest, but now we find ourselves competing with Europe, Asia and Canada – it’s truly a global industry.”

He says greenhouse manufacturers are following an evolution similar to that of automakers and airlines. “Even the ▷



▷ greenhouse business, though it is a smaller niche, is part of the global economy,” Reilly says.

To overcome the global threat, Rough continues to focus on recruiting talented and experienced people, Reilly says. “In our industry, everyone has access to the same steel, aluminum and equipment that goes into a greenhouse, garden center or conservatory,” he says. “What separates us is that we have a very talented and experienced group that makes these projects happen on a day-to-day basis.”

For example, Reilly says his team in a recent competition for a university campus project included a degreed horticultural engineer from Cornell University, another employee who had 15 years of experience managing a major university’s extensive greenhouse range and a project manager with 20 years of experience doing projects for schools and universities.

“On the other hand, we were competing with other greenhouse companies that brought no one more than a salesperson to the table,” he notes. “Our technical capabilities and expertise – that’s the difference.”

**Business Other Stand-Out Projects**

ROUGH ALSO HAS PERFORMED WORK ON THE LEWIS GINTER Botanical Garden in Richmond, Va. This conservatory was constructed and opened to the public in six months.

The conservatory has a 16,617-square-foot floor plan and contains more than 20,000 square feet of glass. The dome is

63 feet tall and creates the palm house interior.

The palm house interior displays a 35-foot-tall Christmas palm tree, along with other plants that reach 30 feet. The two wings house subtropical plants, changing displays of flowers, an authentic English cottage and a display featuring 200 orchids.

The conservatory uses a root-zone heating system inside the beddings. This allows the air temperature to remain at moderate levels, creating an optimum environment for healthy plants and comfortable air temperatures for the visitors.

Another project, the John A. Sibley Horticultural Center renovation at the Gardens at Callaway, Pine Mountain, Ga., demanded that the original conservatory structure remain ▷



▷and that the new roof structure and mechanical systems integrate seamlessly, the company says.

The original structure, designed by Craig, Gaulden and Davis in 1984, was the first conservatory on the property and was innovative in its choice of material and design intent.

The amount and quality of light that reaches the conservatory floor has made the new plantings and displays a success, Rough says. The automated mechanical systems give the facility the potential to grow and change for many years to come. A waterfall, rock formations, lighting and pathways were upgraded, as well.

Rough performs work for private residences on occasion. Dole Foods' Chairman David H. Murdock hired Rough to develop a 14,000-square-foot conservatory and a 24,000-square-foot production greenhouse on his ranch in Ventura Farms, Calif.

The contract included design/engineering, structure and glazing, shade systems, tiered display benches, in-floor heat, perimeter fin tube heat, boilers, fog systems, run-off water system and environmental control system.

### **Blooming Business**

VERY SIMPLY, ROUGH WANTS TO BUILD THE WORLD'S GREATest places for plants, according to Reilly, whether that's in the commercial, research, conservatory or retail sectors.

"Our big-picture vision is to be the leading greenhouse

manufacturer in North America and, eventually, the world," he says. "It's a big goal, but with the right people, it's attainable."

Even though it considers itself a small company, it has made large investments in equipment.

"In the last five years, we've invested heavily in our manufacturing facility and in high-tech equipment," Reilly says. "Two years ago, we invested a million dollars in a laser-cutting machine for tubing – we understand that there are only eight of these machines in the United States. From a fabrication standpoint, this machine cuts within 1/10,000th of an inch, far better than industry standard."

In addition, in March 2004, it bought a company in California that focuses on heating systems for greenhouses. "We thought they were well managed so we bought them and, so far, we've been happy with the results," he says.

With new equipment, infrastructure and a high-caliber management team, Rough plans to continue overseeing challenging and technically difficult projects on budget and on time. "The result will be repeat business and growth," Reilly predicts.

Rough's biggest repeat clients include Home Depot, Lowes and Wal-Mart.

"We think it is great to work and partner with large corporations and we really enjoy working with them," Reilly says. "They are excellent at driving efficiency and at driving costs down – and they keep us on our toes with their fast-paced schedules." ■