



Vic Priestly (left) founded Priestly Demolition, a business he now operates with his children Robin and Ryan Priestly. The family is committed to dealing locally and supporting locally – and is longtime donor to Southlake Regional Health Centre Foundation.

Supporting locally runs in the family

By Cathy Hillard

It's all about the "ripple effect."

That's how Robin Priestly of Priestly Demolition explains her company's support for Southlake Regional Health Centre.

She says it's a no-brainer to support the hospital, given the impact it has on the community.

A passionate believer in keeping things local, Ms Priestly got her values from her father and founder of the family business, Vic Priestly. Now those values run through everything they do at the company.

"My father built his business on dealing locally and supporting locally," she explains, "and along the way Southlake became a natural part of that. There is such a large ripple effect with the hospital." Ms Priestly says she was also influenced by her late uncle, Dr. Bill Diamond, a family physician in Aurora who made it clear to her how important hospitals are and how much community support they need.

Ms. Priestly and her twin brother Ryan were born at the hospital back when it was York County Hospital and, as a local family, they have had plenty of dealings with Southlake over the years, from the neonatal unit to emergency and everything in between.

"You don't realize how important it is until you need it," Ms Priestly says.

The senior Mr. Priestly always supported Southlake and the company continues that support; it is a silver sponsor of the ball, supports all the campaigns and gives regular special gifts to the hospital, including a defibrillator for the neonatal unit in 2011.

Most recently, they have donated their services to clear the site for a new hospice.

"It's a fantastic venture and to be a part of such a needed and great project is a feel-good thing," says Ms. Priestly, adding they often help with other local projects too. "we really believe in being able to help out locally and

our employees love knowing that they are a part of that."

Priestly Demolition started out as Priestly Contracting in 1971. It wasn't until Mr. Priestly was asked to take down a barn as part of a contract that the idea of doing demolition came to him. He saw a niche in the market. Since those days, the company has grown from about 30 staff to almost 300 provincially and boasts the largest, most sophisticated fleet of vehicles in Ontario.

Describing themselves as "engineers of structural demolition," the company prides itself on the intricate, precise way in which they take a building apart. No wrecking balls in sight, only high-reach machines that literally take bites out of the concrete and clip at the steel structures. It's a delicate operation requiring plenty of preparation and skill.

What is more, over 95 percent of the materials are recycled. They even have their own crushing plant for concrete.

A practice now mandated by law, Ms. Priestly says the company was doing this from the start, as her father always had the mindset of re-using and recycling.

"My father had insight," she says. "Even in the 150-foot flagpole outside our offices came from a demolition site."

Although their father is still involved with the company, Robin and Ryan now handle all the day-to-day operations. Ms. Priestly looks after finance and administration while her brother looks after the fieldwork and the equipment. She says Ryan has real vision for the company, always looking to move the company forward with state-of-the-art equipment and techniques and yet the company ledgers are still done by hand for Mr. Priestly's benefit. "It's a good balance," she explains.

Ms. Priestly is passionate about demolition, but as a child she had no intention of going into the family business.

"My brother wanted to drive a truck as soon as he could

walk," she explains. "But I swore I wouldn't have anything to do with it."

It was only when she did a stint at the salvage yard as a teenager that she realized her passion.

"People had pride in their work and I admired that. They all had different skills and when they brought them together it all came out beautifully. I remember thinking I wanted to be a part of it," she says.

Even so, Mr. Priestly insisted both his children do post-secondary education and work outside the family business before committing to it. This is the approach Ms. Priestly intends to take with her own son.

"It's also about learning what it is to make a dollar and spend a dollar and learning about hard work," she says.

That work ethic makes Ms Priestly a keen promoter of trades. Within Priestly Demolition she has seen many people who have graduated up the skills ladder.

"Trades are hard, honest work, but you can make a good living," she says.

She is proud of her workforce and cares deeply that they are looked after, which is why she is equally passionate about Southlake and what it offers to the community.

"when you support a hospital, you are supporting help for the people that work for you," she says. "Southlake is a great place and it will always have our support because of how much it helps-whether you are a baby or in your final days.

"as a large organization, we get a lot of requests, but we never mind getting the call from Southlake, as they have the personal touch and they do such important work."