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# fencepost

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SOMEONE YOU SHOULD KNOW:  
ROBINSON FENCE

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GETTING THE JOB: BIDS, SPECS  
AND CONTRACTS

## The Fence Marketplace: LOOKING AT 2007

**FENCEPOST**

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Someone You Should Know

## Robinson Fence – Association Advocate

One of AFA's most enthusiastic members, Robinson Fence prides itself on its professionalism.

Robinson Fence, Inc., in Springfield, Missouri, is a full-service contractor that specializes in commercial projects including city, state and federal governments. Mike Robinson, Vice President, explained that the company sells and installs chain-link, wood, PVC, ornamental iron, and gate operators. "About the only type of fence we do not sell and install is agricultural fencing," Robinson said.

The company employs about twenty employees, teaming them in five to eight two- and three-man crews, depending on the season. Robinson points out that about 60% of the business is commercial, and the majority of that work is chain link. The other 40% of business is a mixture of residential products.

"We are focused on our mission statement: *Robinson Fence Company is committed to delivering the best quality products and providing a professionally trained staff with our "no nonsense" approach of honesty and integrity.*" Robinson explained. "We use one motto in all of our advertising which is *'Professional Fencing by Professional People.'*"

The company was founded in 1978 by Robinson's father, Ray Robinson. Ray Robinson has been in the industry since the late 1960's. "I personally helped install fence through high school and college," Robinson said. "After I graduated from Missouri State University, I worked in the corporate world for about a year. But the fence business is in my blood. I came back to Robinson Fence in the spring of 1995 and have continued to help the company grow. My father is still involved with the company on a part-time basis; he likes to come in to look over the books."

Like so many other fencers, Robinson says their biggest challenge is finding good people. "Whether it is installers, office staff, or sales people, it is tough to find hard working, qualified individuals."

As a result, said Robinson, "We work hard to insure that we maintain the terrific staff that we currently have. Our employees are treated well and paid well because we want to keep them around. We involve them in the day-to-day discussions about the business because we value their experience and ideas. That includes our installers. They are the guys doing the job; we listen closely to their ideas and concerns."

"When we are looking to hire new staff or installers, we first look at friends and acquaintances of our current employees. They know what the job entails and usually they recommend people who can meet those requirements," he added.

Robinson says he looks for a strong foundation of honesty and integrity with the ability and the desire to work in a prospective employee. "When we see that in a person, we will train them for the job. Our training is hands-on. They are sent out with our crew leaders. The crew leaders teach them the skills they need to succeed and then assess whether the trainee has the ability to do the job. If the ability is there, we invite them to become part of the team."

"If an employee is willing to refer a friend or relative to Robinson Fence for potential employment, it shows a sense of pride within the company," he said. "They know we treat people professionally and honestly. Robinson Fence has been in business for 28 years and we have a top-notch reputation. We will maintain that."

"We have very skilled people from the top to the bottom of our organization," Robinson explained. "Our sales staff has a combined



The "whole gang" at Robinson Fence.



Robinson Fence employees, from left to right: Shawn McCormick, Superintendent; Jon Hayward, Sales; Tony Grigg, Sales; Ray Robinson, President &amp; Sales; Mike Robinson, V. President &amp; Commercial Sales; Sammy Woods, Clerical.

experience of 80 years in the fence industry and they do a great job with customers. Contrary to popular belief, the customer is not always right. If a customer's complaint is legitimate, we fix it; if it is not legitimate, many times we still fix it. But there are some instances we don't fix their concern because the customer is not always right."

Robinson has some straightforward advice for his peers in the industry: "Treat all people with respect, whether they are your employees or your customers. Each one has value to your company."

One of the company's greatest strengths is the ability to handle complex projects. Robinson Fence does a lot of bid work. Occasionally architects or engineers will require a fence in an unusual area, but the



## YOURAFA

installation details are not clear on the drawings. The company's experience allows them to complete the job and provide a structurally sound solution.

### Three memorable jobs

When asked about the most difficult or unusual job that Robinson Fence was challenged to complete, Robinson recalled three of them in particular.

"The first job was to install a total of 2,185 feet of PVC privacy fence at a convention center," he said. It ranged from 5' to 12' tall, with 318' being 11' tall and 277' being 12' tall. At that time there were no field tests or product data available on a PVC privacy fence that tall. The architect concluded that a steel I-beam inside the 5 x 5 post would make the fence structurally sound. With the exception of having to screw every other picket to the rails in each section to keep them from blowing out in a high wind, he was correct."

"Another job that was challenging was a project we did for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the Auxiliary Gated Spillway at Table Rock Lake in Branson, Missouri. It consisted of approximately 1,600 feet of ornamental steel fence as well as approximately 1,300 feet of chain link fence. The most difficult part of the project was the working conditions. With the exception of some of the ornamental fence being installed on the bridge deck, the majority of the job was on severe slopes and extremely tough digging.



An installation for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers at the Auxiliary Gated Spillway at Table Rock Lake in Branson, Missouri, included 1,600 feet of ornamental steel and approximately 1,300 feet of chain link fence on especially tough terrain.



The company installed 2,185 feet of 12' Vinyl privacy fencing at the Oasis Inn

First we installed a chain link fence at the bottom of the spillway, on solid limestone, behind six huge flood gates to keep people out. Those gates were holding back a lot of water. Next we installed a chain link fence around the control building. The fence did not require a top rail but it did have a motion sensor for additional security. Without the top rail the fence would continuously set off the motion sensor in high wind. I suggested they consider turning down the sensitivity of the motion sensor just a little bit — they declined. They believed the chain link fabric was too loose, so they tested it. When it passed, they turned the sensitivity down and the problem was solved."

"The final unusual job that we completed was the installation of one of the first IMPASSE fences in the United States for the Missouri National Guard in Jefferson City in the spring of 2003. It was exciting and a great learning experience," he said.

### FENCETECH is like the Emmy Awards

Robinson explained the value of the company's AFA membership. "We did not join the AFA until 2002. I had this caveman mentality of 'I know everything about the fence business, why do I need to join an association.' I was totally wrong. You get out of an association what you put into it. I have been to six FENCETECHs. It is like the Emmy Awards for the Fence Industry. Everybody in the industry is there. You learn about new products and new technologies, there are great

seminars and roundtable discussions that you can attend. There is a wealth of information to be learned there. If you have never attended FENCETECH, you are missing out. You will definitely pay for the trip with the knowledge you gain."

"The chapter seminars can be very educational, too," Robinson continued. "Our local Midwest Chapter invited the Missouri Department of Transportation and a commercial driver's license instructor to join us to talk about driving a commercial vehicle on state highways. The regulations for commercial vehicles are extremely detailed. The presentation was very helpful. At our next meeting we are having a representative from the Missouri One Call system join us to discuss underground utilities. Both of these are huge issues for all fence installers."

"The AFA provides big benefits to our industry," Robinson added. "The ability to network with your peers and learn about new technologies and products is very important. I realize that my initial mentality of 'I don't need help' was totally wrong. I have learned more in the last two years since the formation of the Midwest Chapter than at any other time. We're like a big family. Human nature is to help each other, to share thoughts and ideas. An association is a great vehicle to facilitate that."

"Additionally, our association takes care of the industry as a whole on a national level," he continued. "The AFA can lend its collective expertise to a government entity to help with laws and codes pertaining to our industry products. The association's input helps the governing bodies to create appropriate laws and rules to govern our industry. We have seen this in action in the areas of gate operators and composite products."

Robinson Fence truly understands the value of association membership and that makes them *Someone You Should Know.* ☺