

# Current Issue



## Roosevelt Petry Jr. : Persistence Personified

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There's never a dull moment with Roosevelt Petry.

A glimpse inside his office suggests as much. Dozens of plaques adorn his wall honoring him and his company's achievements and recognizing the charity work he's done for groups all over Port Arthur and Jefferson County.

There's a large picture of the Toyota Center, home of the Houston Rockets, with a small placard recognizing his company for its help with constructing the arena.

Not far from his desk are several pictures of his wife of 25 years, Marlene, the love of his life who has stood by his side while he worked his tail off, whether it was building houses or teaching [classes](#), he credits her for helping him become the success he is today.

"I love that woman," he says, leaning back in his chair, "she believed in me."

And of course his office wouldn't be incomplete without a picture of his buddy – Stitch.

“That’s my guy!” Petry exclaims, beaming broadly and pointing to a picture of his 8 ½ year-old Boston Terrier. Petry loves his dog, who he rescued after [Hurricane Rita](#).

“He was abandoned after the hurricane, and he just ran up and jumped into my truck,” Petry says. Stitch was in bad shape when Petry found him, but after several operations and a chunk of change later, Stitch was stitched up and has been a Petry ever since.

Yet it's easy to see why Petry bonded with his dog – they both overcame long odds to get where they are.

The 49-year-old Petry is self-made, wealthy and has a motor that runs from the time he wakes up in the morning until he rests his head at night. But Petry wasn't born into wealth, and no one gave him any handouts along the way. He's had a few encounters over the course of his life that have molded him and helped put him in the position he's in today, as the owner and CEO of GP [Industrial Contractors](#), a Port Arthur company that specializes in building refineries and petrochemical plants in addition to offering a slew of industrial services.

The oldest of four children, Petry has been an entrepreneur since childhood. Never afraid to work, as a child growing up in Beaumont, Petry, who is also affectionately known as “Teddy Bear”, started [mowing lawns](#) at a young age.

Whether he was pushing his mower all over the neighborhood or pulling it while riding his bike, he discovered the merits and benefits of a strong work ethic at a very young age.

“Not only were people paying me to mow their lawn, but they would feed me and give me something to drink too,” says the easily excitable Petry.

He admired watching his grandfather and uncles dabble in different businesses, and it gave him the idea that he was going to run his own business one day too. He graduated from Hebert High School in 1980, worked around the area for a time before a chance meeting with Ted Poe, then a judge, inspired him. The two made a special connection that continues to this day.

“I am very impressed with Roosevelt’s career,” said Poe, “he [credits](#) the good Lord for what he’s accomplished and he’s been a very successful businessman. He hires a lot of folks, and he gives back so much to the community. A lot of the things he does, no one knows about, which is fine, and that’s the way he wants it. He’s behind the scenes helping different folks, helping different charities and groups and kids.”

Poe credits Petry making a decision at a young age to better himself as vital to his future success.

“He assumed ownership of Roosevelt Petry,” said Poe, “he had to prove something to himself, and he didn’t make any excuses like so many other people in our culture do. I’m very proud of the guy.”

Petry made the move to Port Arthur from Beaumont in the late 1980s after meeting Marlene through a mutual friend and the two married a short time later. Petry dabbled in building houses and McDonald's restaurants before he suffered an injury working in a refinery. After receiving a settlement, he went to Lamar and earned a bachelor's degree from the Industrial Engineering Department.

Almost 20 years after crossing paths with Ted Poe changed his life; in 1998, another meeting would alter Petry's career path. He had his sights set on going to Law School at the time, and was prepared to do it before he met Morris Albright Jr. when the two were members of Port Arthur's Economic Development Corporation's ad hoc committee.

"Carl Parker had put the committee together, and we were raising money for Lamar (State College in Port Arthur). We raised a lot of money in a short time. But we met, and because of that, we connected real well and he talked about being in business together. I wasn't interested at the time because I was going to go to law school. But after about the third time, I started talking to my family, and I said 'let's give it a shot.' So we became partners."

Along with Pat Guillory and Gulf Copper, they started what is now GP Industries and after a few years, Petry eventually bought out Guillory and Gulf Copper and is now the sole owner.

"He's a Horatio Alger story," said former Senator Carl Parker of Petry. Alger wrote many books about young men who came from meager backgrounds but persevered because of hard work and determination.

"He didn't have much growing up, hell, he made money in high school putting peep holes in people's doors," Parker said. "But he's made lots of money, and he's been very generous, and he's given thousands and thousands of dollars helping others."

And it's his genuine generous spirit that endears Petry to so many according to Parker.

"He genuinely likes people, and that comes across in his personal relationships," Parker said. "Some people you talk to, you might get the impression they're in Never-Neverland, not paying much attention to what you're saying. But with Roosevelt, you always know he's listening and you see that he cares. That's kind of an elusive quality, but he's got it."

While no one can question his hard work, his drive and just the energy that permeates when he's around, it remains Petry's commitment to others that is a major testament of his success and ultimately what keeps him going.

“I love helping other people,” says Petry, “I can’t describe the feeling I get when I help other people. God has allowed me to do the things I do, and he could’ve chosen anybody, and I’m grateful that he chose me. And the ultimate satisfaction is when you help others, and then they go out and help somebody. That makes it all worthwhile.”

And with all that he’s accomplished – and still has left to accomplish – because if there’s one thing about Petry, he doesn’t stop, he doesn’t hesitate when asked what he’s most proud of.

“The people around me.”