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## Big50 Profile: John Kiernan

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By Leah Thayer

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How many major changes can a remodeling company undertake in a few short years — and why fix what doesn't seem to be broken? John Kiernan (Big50 2005) responds:

**Name change.** John Kiernan Construction became Kiernan Remodeling + Design in 2006. The 19-year-old firm, in Bradenton, Fla., was not only embarking on an eventual ownership change, but the new name “is more self-explanatory,” Kiernan says, adding that the old name begged the question, “Do they build dams or bridges or what?”

**Succession plan.** Kiernan has designated 34-year-old general manager Ben DePrenger to take over the reins when Kiernan retires in 2014 at age 65. The five-year time frame “lets us go through this curve together,” says Kiernan, referring to the economy. “He'll be much better for it.” DePrenger is in the process of obtaining his Florida contractor's license.

**Design staff.** Hiring a full-time interior designer means clients can finalize finishes prior to contract. “She's amazingly good at getting clients' likes and dislikes,” Kiernan says, referring work that he does not enjoy. Also, the company designer has earned his Florida architect's license, further helping clients see “the true value” of using the firm, Kiernan says.

**No more allowances.** With design staff nailing down details in advance, the company has been able to eliminate allowances from construction contracts. “For the first time, we can very accurately predict our gross profit,” DePrenger says. “And there's less slippage.”

**Half the staff.** Kiernan Remodeling + Design now has eight employees, down from 15. “We had a lot of in-house carpenters and found we weren't very efficient running a carpentry business,” DePrenger says. Careful pruning has made the company more of a construction management firm with a small in-house production staff.

Though still set up for larger jobs, the company is taking on small projects as well. In previous downturns, “we've been insulated,” Kiernan says. “When people couldn't move, they improved.” Now they're reluctant to spend at all — but he believes a carefully honed new image will help the company survive its toughest economy to date.



Credit: Don Hall Productions