



Kilgore, Texas

East Texas Lumber was founded in 1934 when Ronald E. Spradlin Sr. (known as "Shiplap") bought one of the 13 existing lumber yards in and around Kilgore. He had been transferred to Kilgore to be the manager of the Arkmo Lumber yard when his son, Ronald E. (Sonny) Spradlin Jr., was less than a year old. R. E. Sr. lived over the lumberyard, as was customary for the manager, with his wife "Sis" and son, Sonny.

They operated East Texas Lumber in Kilgore from several different locations over the years including one across from the high school, where the new post office is now, at the corner of highway 259 and Woodlawn, and behind the old post office. The yard shut down during World War II because, in addition to the pre-war depression, all lumber and building materials went to the war efforts.

During the war, Shiplap, Sis and Sonny moved to Tyler and operated a bowling alley beside the old Blackstone Hotel downtown. The Bowling Alley was open 18 hours a day and was one of the only forms of recreation available to the soldiers riding the bus in from Fort Fannin. Sis and Shiplap stayed in the hotel where Sis did the family wash in the bathtub each night. They took turns at the front desk of the bowling alley while Sonny was a pin-setter. During the war, the family saved enough money to buy another lumber yard after the war.



Sonny Spradlin

In the mid '50s, Shiplap said to Sonny, "Son, last month we sold \$1200 of lumber. If we can do that every month, we can make a decent living!"

In 1951, East Texas Lumber also started selling Magcobar, later MI, drilling mud. Originally, drilling chemicals were commonly sold and delivered by lumber yards all over Texas, but East Texas Lumber is the last one still doing so, and is also the oldest MI distributor in the world in continuous operation.

After playing baseball at UT in Austin, and a stint in the Army, Sonny returned to Kilgore to help run the family lumber yard. After returning to Kilgore, Sonny met and married Betty Bird, a Longview girl who was a Rangerette at the time.

Betty and Sonny moved into the apartment above the lumber yard building upon their marriage in 1956. They eventually were the proud parents of four boys, Ronnie, Don, Jonn and Lon. All of the boys helped at the lumber yards working summers, Saturdays and weekends along with their dad and grand dad.

Shiplap died in 1971 and Sonny retired in 1983 after heart surgery.

One Sunday afternoon in the summer of 1977, Ronnie and J. Mitchell were riding around and discussing what they wanted to do when they got out of school. They had a lot of ideas and choices to make but they did agree on one thing - they were both very sure they were not going to work in the family business!

So much for making plans and sticking with them. Ronnie bought the lumber yard from his parents in 2002 and has operated it since. The lumber yard was not very big in the home-building industry over the decades, but starting in 1991, went to great efforts to get into the custom home building materials business. The short notice and quick efficient service that they had developed to comply with the needs of the oil field translated to even more remarkable service in the home-building sector.

East Texas Lumber now has the largest fleet of any lumber yard in the surrounding counties and sells 95% of its building materials outside of Kilgore's city limits. With more than 40 employees in Kilgore and Palestine, East Texas Lumber has talented, knowledgeable, qualified personnel to meet the qualifications of even the most demanding customers.



Ronnie Spradlin (center)