

21 Years at Shapiro & Duncan

I wanted something better for my family. I wanted to break the cycle. I had a drive that was hidden that needed to be discovered. I was a heavy machine operator who decided to attend a friend's company picnic one summer. This was the summer I met David Shapiro, the man that would forever change my life and continue to inspire me to this day. Mr. Shapiro, also known as "Big Daddy" saw potential in me. After a brief conversation, he asked me to come work for him as a laborer for his mechanical contracting company doing commercial heating and air-conditioning. I never thought I'd still be working for the same company 21 years later.



Left: James Mayo, Far Right: Dave Shapiro

Shapiro & Duncan introduced me to lifelong friends and mentors like Chuck Sperry, Frank Wynes, and Dave Daniels. These guys taught me everything I know about HVAC/plumbing and all of the skills to properly run a job. They are part of the reason why I love this industry, and have such a passion for my work. Besides the sense of community and family this industry brings, it is exciting to be challenged to work on different projects year after year. The construction industry certainly does not have the everyday mundane job routine.

Throughout my career at Shapiro & Duncan, my most challenging job was Montgomery County Judicial Center, the forth courtroom in the country to meet Gold Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Standards. This project consisted of three phases. Phase one renovated the heating and air conditioning system for the existing Judicial Center for floors six through nine and the roof. The majority of the work was performed over nights and weekends to avoid disrupting court proceedings. This job was extremely demanding with a lot of structural work, replacing the roof and setting heavy air handling units. It was a great learning experience and it proved to test all of my problem solving skills. It is very rewarding when you figure it all out and produce a quality end product.

I enjoyed working on a variety of projects. South County High School in Lorton, Virginia was one of them. I worked with Foremen Glen Smith and Chuck Sperry. This project was a turning point in my life. It was the first opportunity for me to become a Leadman. The project was a success and it was then that I could clearly identify that this was the career for me. Another notable project I was involved with was Hayfield High School in Alexandria, Virginia. Our Foreman on the job, my mentor, and the person I looked up to after all these years was diagnosed with cancer. He informed me I had to take over the job. It was a challenge, but I was confident with the skills he instilled in me I would get the job done. It was on this project where I discovered that I definitely had the Foreman mentality.

One of the most rewarding parts of my career with Shapiro & Duncan is teaching the young apprentices and passing on the skills I have learned. It's a great feeling to watch them succeed and move up the ladder to knowing I played a part in their journey. It makes me happy to see how far they have come. I hope that they can be an inspiration to the next generation.

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Participating in career day events at local elementary and high schools is also very important to me. Being able to reach the kids who didn't think there were options outside of college is a great feeling. Besides the industry related outreach I am involved with, I have been coaching youth flag football for women and kids for a number of years. For 8 years I played with the USA World Cup Flag Football team and won the National Championships four years in a row. For 23 years, this has been the sport I enjoy most.



People will often ask me, Why this field? I've built great relationships and friendships with people I can trust. I love working with my hands and in different environments. It is a great field to be in! If you start early by the time you are 25 you could be making top pay, and owning your own home. By choosing this field over college, you won't have to worry about student loans. I take pride in my work, and can support my family comfortably. This is a great reliable industry to be in and jobs are out there.

-James Mayo

