

## Benjamin "BJ" Lacy Jr.

# BUSINESS

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## Contractor has pride in things that last

by Jay Woodard  
staff writer

**BLADENBORO** — Brick by brick, Benjamin Lacy Jr. built a successful life and successful business. The mason, say those who know him, is good work and fair dealing.

Lacy began laying brick for 65 cents an hour, then went into business. Today he takes pride in the buildings his B.L. Construction Co. has erected around the region.

The company was the masonry subcontractor for the Country Club of North Carolina, Fayetteville Manufacturing Co. and the education wing at First Baptist Church in Kinston. B.L. is one of the contractors for the Cumberland County classroom.

The Home Federal Savings and Loan building in Lumberton sparks a lively response from Lacy. "That's a fine building," he said. "I got a lot of pride in that."

He can be proud of his background too. His mother, the late Addy Lacy, was a graduate of Mt. Olive Institute in Columbus County, an advanced degree of schooling for a young black woman in rural North Carolina in the 1930s.

His father, the late Benjamin Lacy, joined other parents in an early 1940s trip to Raleigh, petitioning state officials for a high school for blacks in the Bladenboro area.

**Working to succeed**

"There wasn't enough money then for that," Lacy said. Schools for blacks went only through the sixth grade in his community, he said.

So Lacy went to high school in Clarkton. And drove a bus. "A '34 Chevrolet in 1945," he said. "The job paid \$13 a month." It was a long trip, over an hour, one way.

After high school, wanderlust took over and Lacy got a job at H.F. Goodrich in Akron, Ohio.

That summer, "I got a letter



That photo by Dick Brown

**President Reagan** named Benjamin Lacy Jr. national minority contractor of the year in 1988.

from Mama. She said most of my classmates were going to college and that I was to come home and go, too."

At N.C. Agricultural & Technical State University in Greensboro, Lacy lived with the elderly mother of a Bladenboro teacher and walked to class. To close the gap between his money and college expenses, he slaved seven.

"I'd shined shoes here in Bladenboro at the white barber shop since I was 5, so I was a professional at that."

An industrial arts degree in hand, Lacy returned to Bladenboro. He went to work as a bricklayer with a contractor, he late J. Allen Lemson. He earned 65 cents an hour on that first job.

In 1952 he went into business for himself.

His first job was building the foundation for Kelly Supply Co. in Bladenboro.

**"No nothing"**

"I told Mr. (C.L.) K'By, 'I got a mortar box, so wheelbarrow, is nothing.'"

So Kelly had a carpenter make a mortar box that would fit on the hook of Lacy's 1941 Ford. "As he gave me a wheelbarrow."

He didn't make much money on that first job, Lacy said, but he was glad to get it so people could see his work.

They liked it. Lacy built houses

**Profile**

**Name:** Benjamin Lacy Jr.  
**Age:** 67.  
**Name of company:** B.L. Construction Co.  
**Site:** Bladenboro.  
**Number of employees:** 10.  
**Product:** General contracting service.

for Kelly.

"After that, people heard about me," he said.

His first school job was an eight-room addition to Hilly Branch school in Robeson County. Later he was to build numerous buildings with the late Cliff Myers and the late John Stewart of Consolidated Construction Co. of Fayetteville, and several schools with Player Inc. of Fayetteville.

He was always interested in doing quality work and being fair to people," said Henry Player, secretary-treasurer of Player. "He was the masonry subcontractor for Player on a number of projects, the addition to Faxon, the Wilmington Road school and St. Patrick's Church."

In 1977, Lacy incorporated. He then "faded away from masonry and moved more to solid concrete construction" such as pouring walls and making boxed culverts on road projects.

Construction work has brought him into contact with Fayetteville architect Walter Vick.

"I know him to be an absolute gentleman," Vick said. "And he has a vision of not just building a school or a church, but creating structures that enrich people's lives."

In 1977, Lacy also became a general contractor. "We're the only Afro-American general construction firm in the area from Fayetteville to Wilmington that has a gen-

*Lacy is mystified by the difficulty of finding people eager to learn masonry. "It's a beautiful art," he said. He plans to pack his mortar boards and go find masonry recruits in schools.*

eral contractor's license," said Wilson Lacy, B.L. vice president and son of the founder.

As for the hardships he faced growing up in a segregated society, Benjamin Lacy speaks of them, if at all, with detachment, as if they had happened to someone else.

He says his company has benefited from minority-owned, contractor provisions mandating participation by companies owned by blacks and other minority groups.

"That's been a good thing," Wilson Lacy said, "because we have employed hundreds of people that normally would not have had a chance to work. Because the majority firms probably would not have hired them."

President Reagan named Lacy National Minority Contractor of the Year in 1988.

**A few good boys**

Lacy is mystified by the difficulty of finding people eager to learn masonry. "It's a beautiful art," he said. He plans to pack his mortar boards and go find masonry recruits in schools.

"I'll ask the principal if there are a few boys who want to learn how to spread mortar, that's the first step, and how to lay bricks."

"I want them to know it takes time to learn a skill and accomplish something with it. You have to persevere. I don't give up."