

Foundation repair company changes course

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(Photo: Mark Henle/The Republic)

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The temptation was there. But when choosing between selling customers an inadequate solution they thought they needed or seeing his business fail, Bob Brown valued a clean conscience over revenue.

However, the president and owner of Arizona Foundation Solutions turned a dilemma into an inventive opportunity that saved his company and distinguished it from the competition all while maintaining his integrity.



The pipe can be run from the roof down through a closet where it will be out of sight in the home. (Photo: Handout / Arizona Foundation Solutions)

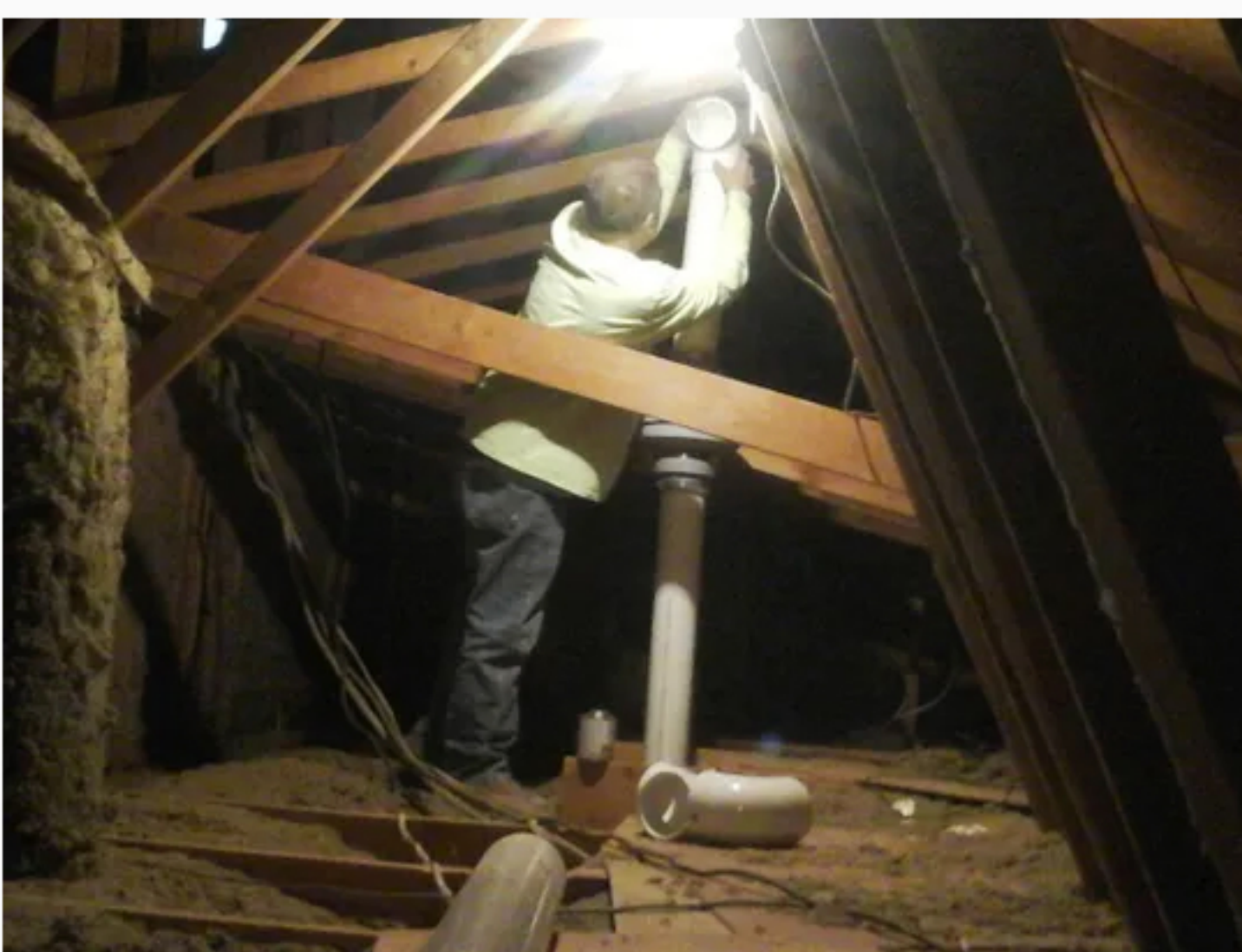
When Brown started his Phoenix foundation repair company in 2000, most calls came from

STORY HIGHLIGHTS

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homeowners who believed their homes were settling. Brown knew it was the opposite problem. Heaving, or swelling due to excess moisture being soaked up like a sponge by the desert clay beneath the structure was causing the cracks in the walls, uneven flooring and separation from the concrete.

At the time, there was no solution for this problem. Customers didn't want to believe the theory. Many insisted settling was the issue and demanded it be fixed. But Brown wasn't in the business of selling people what they didn't need – even if they asked for it.



Ventilation pipe being installed in the attic of a home that has saturated soil under its slab. (Photo: Handout / Arizona Foundation Solutions)

Faced with sales representatives who worked on commission and needed to provide for their own families, pressure from suppliers who wanted him to sell their products and battling to break even, Brown said there was a lot of rationalized temptation to give in.

"I could see selling them a bunch of piers but not sleep well at night. I couldn't do that and look at myself in the mirror," Brown said, referring to the device used to repair settling. "That's why I tried so hard to come up with solution. We had to make a living."



Terry Henry puts together a ven fan, April 15, 2015, on an Arizona Foundation Solutions job in Peoria. (Photo: Mark Henle/The Republic)

Brown grew up in the construction industry and spent his career in various areas of the field. He is a research guru, receiving several patents dating back to his first company, Arizona Repair Masons Inc., that he started after graduating from Arizona State University. That business remains operational today.

He applied his out-of-the-box approach to heaving and developed his patent-pending MoistureLevel ventilation system to tackle the problem.

Brown said his company has undergone steady growth and is in the process of adding more staff.

Currently, 70 percent of Brown's clientele is residential with 30 percent commercial. Arizona Foundation Solutions did \$300 projects during the company's early days, Brown said. Now, the company is handling jobs in the six and seven figures. A \$500,000 repair project to the historic Prescott Courthouse was among them.

Often, the cost to fix heaving is less than the cost of most foundation repairs, Brown said. Each month, Brown's team meets a handful of confused homeowners who have paid another company for a settling repair only to see problems reoccur and find out heaving was the issue.

"There is a lot of lack of education in the industry. We can offer both solutions. If you only offer one, how can you correctly interpret the problem?" Brown said.

Inspections comprise a large part of business, with an average of 200 a month, he said. His crew does 20-30 repairs each month. Most involve heaving, but some are legitimate settling.

Gilbert homeowner Brenda Gogue is among those who experienced both. She and her husband, Jed, noticed cracks in the foundation and separation. They assumed it was settling but when they called Brown's company, were told the problem also was heaving.

"They're the only ones that talked about heaving. It made sense to me," said Gogue, who had the repairs done in January. "We had lots of questions and they did a really good job of explaining what's going on in our house."

She said everyone cleaned up and left her home spotless and was professional throughout. She was pleasantly surprised when Brown himself came out to see the work.

"It was good of the owner to actually come out to make sure we were confident that we were doing the right thing. He's a very knowledgeable guy," she said.

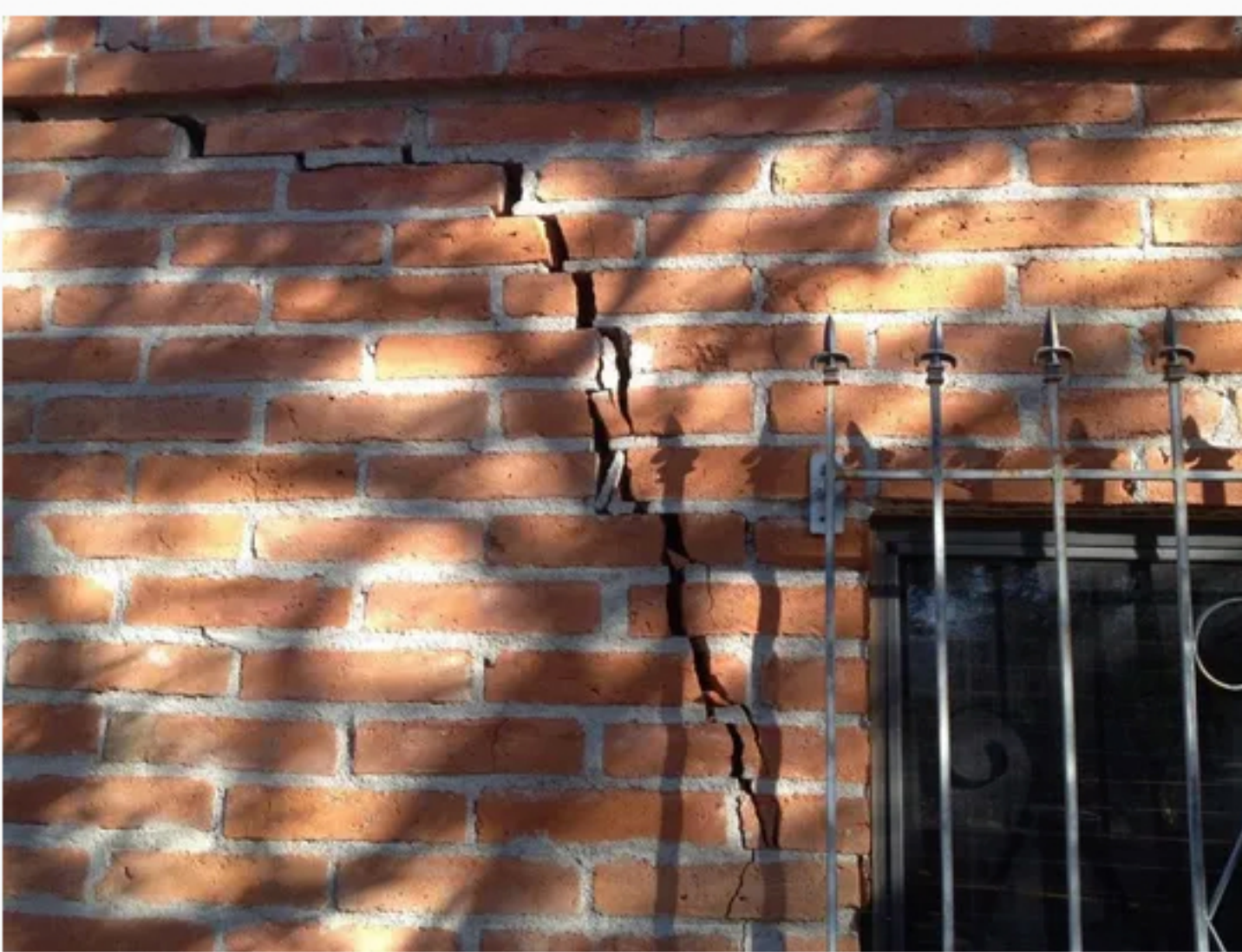
Brown was born in St. Johns, Ariz., and moved to California with his family as a child. By age 10, Brown was building forts in his backyard with various materials. These became walk-in structures with electricity capabilities. His father worked in the construction supply industry and when he was a teen, Brown worked for a stucco company owned by his sister's in-laws.

"I always liked to see the results of what I do. Construction gives tangible results, and you can see you're making a difference," he said.

He returned to attend ASU, where he earned degrees in architecture and finance. For tuition money, Brown fixed broken curbs he spotted in shopping center parking lots. He drove around with concrete in the back of his truck. His price: \$300 to pour a new 20-foot section of curb.

"I had an old Chevy pickup. The only way to keep it from overheating was to drive with heat on in summer," Brown recalled.

Brown launched Arizona Repair Masons, specializing in concrete repair. Eventually, he got into foundation repair and started his second company. Now, he's moved away from concrete work and has geared his business toward solving technical problems. As a result, he's learned a lot of engineering principles.



Large cracks like this on the exterior of a house can indicate problems with foundations. Credit: Arizona Foundation Solutions. (Photo: Handout / Arizona Foundation Solutions)

Brown credited his success to a willingness to knock on doors, hard work and constant education. When his first company was new, Brown underwent foot surgery. He hopped on one foot for 12 weeks finishing concrete. He didn't have a choice.

Persistence and creativity have been his key drivers.

"I always want to come up with concepts or solutions to help," Brown said. "I don't give up. I don't let setbacks get in my way. I keep charging forward."



After work was done to secure the foundations of the house, the crack is much smaller. Now the seams between the bricks can be refilled. Credit: Arizona Foundation Solutions. (Photo: Handout / Arizona Foundation Solutions)

Arizona Foundation Solutions

Where: 3841 E. Superior Ave., Phoenix

Employees: 35

Interesting stat: About 75 percent of homes that Arizona Foundation Solutions evaluates experience heaving as opposed to settling, according to owner Bob Brown.

Details: 480-386-0580, foundationrepairsaz.com