



In a year when the industry hit bottom, these companies came out on top.

**T**wenty-five years ago, when the annual selection of the Big50 began, the goal was to identify the 50 U.S. cities where the most remodeling activity was taking place, then find the largest remodeling company in each city. Simple.

Too simple, in fact. The assumption was that big companies must be doing something right, and that big means better. But by that criterion, year two would have listed the same 50 remodeling companies. So the editors switched from looking for the biggest to looking for the best, regardless of size.

New criteria included standards of financial performance that focused less on total revenue and more on net profit. Longevity also became important — because rapid growth, common for startup

companies, can also lead to equally rapid decline, the Big50 need to demonstrate staying power. Over time, other elements entered into the equation, so that today, individuals and their companies are evaluated for leadership, service to the industry, service to the local community, and how well they treat employees and trade partners.

And last year, we partnered with GuildQuality to survey candidates' customers and present the Remodeling Service Excellence Award to Big50 companies that consistently deliver exceptional customer service.

Times have changed. Today's remodeling environment bears little resemblance to that of 1986. But one thing hasn't changed: The Big50 still represent the very best that the industry has to offer.

Congratulations.

BY REMODLING STAFF

**Michael Bullinger**  
**Western Products**  
Fargo, N.D.

*Exterior remodeling • 62 years in business  
2009 volume: \$8.8 million • Staff: 26 office,  
46 field*

**W**estern Products was founded to sell fire extinguishers and lightning rods. Today it is a manufacturer, distributor, and installer of roofing, window and gutter products, and siding — including steel siding. The company also operates and supplies U.S. Seamless, a franchise network.

Being a retail home improvement company selling and installing roofing, siding, and windows in its own local market gives Western Products, the manufacturer and supplier, a sense of what works and what doesn't in the products it makes. The company operates a



showroom in Fargo, North Dakota's largest city. The showroom offers a look at not just kitchen, siding, and other displays but pool tables, hot tubs, fireplace inserts, patio furniture, and cabinets. Owner and president Michael Bullinger says that employee retention is a management goal, one reason why Western Products offers a generous contribution to its employees' 401(k) plans and full health insurance coverage. "We brag about the longevity of our people," Bullinger says.

In 2008, Western Products celebrated its 60th year in business by planting 5,000 job signs in 5,000 yards throughout its territory in Minnesota and the Dakotas. —J.C.