

# VIEW FROM ON TOP

*Scotsman Iain Fergusson has turned a childhood interest into a thriving Wilmington roofing company.*

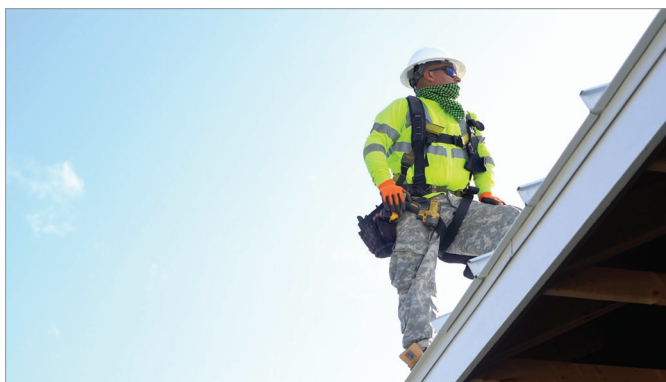
**BY JENNINGS COOL**  
**PHOTOS BY BRANDI SWARMS**

**W**hile growing up in his ancestral home in Scotland, Iain Fergusson remembers spending time repairing its slate roof. He enjoyed the work, learning that preventing leaks requires good, honest effort.

Decades later in 2005 at age 30 and living in Wilmington, Fergusson started Highland Roofing, the name a nod to his Scottish roots. He has built it into a \$20 million revenue business with more than 50 employees, earning judge's votes as a winner in *BUSINESS NORTH CAROLINA*'s annual Small Businesses of the Year competition.

Fergusson came to the U.S. in the late 1990s after dropping out of the University of Glasgow, joining his former wife, Rebecca; they met while she was in Scotland on a study-abroad program. He found work doing shingle and tile projects for a residential roofing contractor for about nine months. "I just remembered I loved being up high on the roof."

Not ready to settle down, the couple spent a few years adventuring around the world, traveling through Europe and the U.S. They planted roots in January 2000 after cutting short plans for a road trip through North Carolina that started and ended in Wilmington. The decision came after enjoying a lunch outdoors during a beautiful, sunny day. "We never finished the road trip; it was just too nice," he says.



For the first five years in the coastal city, Fergusson worked odd jobs, including teaching tennis through a friendship with a local pro. After their twins were born, Fergusson got serious



2020  
**SMALL BUSINESSES**  
★ of the YEAR ★

## Highland Roofing

Roofing company

Headquarters:  
**Wilmington**

President:  
**Iain Fergusson**

Employees:  
**50**

Founded:  
**2005**

Special sauce:  
**Successful expansion into commercial work**

about finding a steady job to provide for his family.

"Because I dropped out of college, the only thing I knew was roofing," Fergusson says. He decided to join a local roofing company, gaining knowledge needed to start his own business.

After a few months on the job, he broke off and founded Highland Roofing.

"I started the business without a whole lot of knowledge," Fergusson says. "It's kind of like what I did when I took a job teaching tennis, even though I did not know how to play tennis. I found myself with a roofing company, not knowing enough about roofing. But I was aware of it and careful with it. I was successful because I learned on the job."

The business, which is co-owned by Fergusson and Rebecca, specializes in commercial roofing projects, including repairs, replacements and restoration. In 2015, Highland Roofing moved away from residential roofing after acquiring a local competitor, Hanover Iron Works, a year earlier. Hanover had revenue of about \$2.5 million annually and



*Iain Fergusson, president of Highland Roofing*

provided an established commercial customer base.

Revenue has increased from \$8.5 million in 2017, \$13.7 million in 2018 and \$21.1 million in 2019. Customers include some high-profile Wilmington employers such as Live Oak Bank and fintech company nCino. Separately, Fergusson owns Coastal Fabrication, a sheet metal business that gets most of its revenue from making metal flashings and trim for Highland.

A key factor in Highland's growth was the creation in 2017 of a division that applies a GE Silicone sealant. "The materials can be applied on top of the existing roof, and the membrane is essentially created onsite using a fluid-applied process resulting in a monolithic and lightweight system," Fergusson says. "It saves on landfill materials, helps businesses be more energy efficient and saves on long-term energy costs."

Some of the revenue growth also stems from repairs related to widespread damage caused by Hurricanes Florence and Dorian in 2018 and 2019. But Fergusson says the ultimate source is a team of talented and dedicated employees.

"Wilmington is a really good-sized town. If you do good work, if you treat people well and get a good reputation, your reputation will spread quite quickly," he says.

Highland expanded to Myrtle Beach four years ago and added a Raleigh location in 2018. Growth at the beach has slowed this year because of the hospitality industry's pandemic troubles, while the company has intentionally grown its Triangle-area business at a slow pace. "Now we are starting to put more boots on the ground and take on some larger projects," he says.

Plans call for an expansion into Charlotte, but Fergusson says he's more focused on expanding at the current locations and improving internal processes.

"I am going to grow, in terms of revenue, less than I probably could in order to grow right — to be able to continue to refine the internal processes, to continue to improve our culture, even more so, and to get the team that I do have really gelling." ■