



Former basketball teammates Justin Hamilton '03, left, and Christopher Stern '03 started a successful construction company.

Kimberly Simpson/Rochester Business Journal

## Graduates construct Rochester Top 100 company

First-year students Justin Hamilton and Christopher Stern were standing on the sidelines of the basketball court in 1998 when they started talking about majors.

"He said, 'What are you studying,'" remembers Hamilton, who was undeclared engineering at the time. "He said, 'I'm thinking about declaring civil engineering technology.' I was like, 'We have that here?'"

That conversation between teammates was the beginning of Hamilton Stern Construction, a company that was No. 1 on the Rochester Chamber Top 100 list of fastest growing private companies in 2016.

The 2003 graduates both selected RIT in part because of the opportunity to play basketball. Stern, who grew up in Orchard Park, N.Y., moved to Charleston, S.C., after graduating to work for the Department of Transportation. He had done some co-ops in that part of the country and liked the area.

But he didn't love his job, which was quality assurance, because it wasn't hands on. In 2004 he moved to the Albany region where Hamilton, a Schenectady, N.Y., native, was working. They didn't work together for long,

Hamilton, who had met his future wife at a friend's house in the Rochester area, moved back to town at the end of 2004 and got into the high-end custom residential business with his father-in-law. They moved to commercial buildings in 2007. He was on every job site and honed his construction skills.

By 2007, Stern also was back in Rochester after stops in North Carolina and Florida working as a project manager. He was drawn to town by his future wife, whom he met at Hamilton's wedding.

That's when the civil engineers talked more seriously about going into business together.

"Probably the best decision we ever made was not doing that then," said Hamilton. "We didn't have the contacts and the know-how to do what we are doing today. We would never be where we are today."

By 2010, though, they were ready to give self-employment a shot. Their first project was an \$8,100 bathroom renovation in May of that year.

"We showed up in a shirt and tie and sold the job," Stern said.

"The next day we showed up in a T-shirt

and jeans and tore the thing up."

That project led to others and their business quickly grew to 10 employees by the second year. Today, they have 30 employees and work out of 9,000-square-feet of space in Pittsford, N.Y.

From 2014 to 2015, the business grew by 160 percent in annual sales, landing it the No. 1 spot on the Top 100. The growth can be attributed to large projects, including the renovation of two historic buildings for the Urban League of Rochester.

They hope to continue to grow their company by doing good work and hiring talented people. They have no regrets.

"I'm working with my best friend," Hamilton said.

Added Stern: "We certainly have fun."

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### To learn more

For details about the company, go to [HamiltonStern.com](http://HamiltonStern.com).