

## Profile: Richard Ghilotti

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**Name:** Richard Ghilotti

**Title:** Owner and president

**Company:** Ghilotti Construction Co.

**Company address:** 246 Ghilotti Ave., Santa Rosa, CA 95407

**Phone:** 707-585-1221

**Website:** [www.ghilotti.com](http://www.ghilotti.com)

**Age:** 57

**Residence:** San Rafael

**Professional background:** Ghilotti Construction: president (1992-present); Ghilotti Brothers: operations manager (1983-92), superintendent (1973-83), and operating engineer (1964-73)

**Education:** BS in finance, Santa Clara University, 1968

**Staff:** 80 full-time, 350 peak

BY JEFF QUACKENBUSH  
STAFF REPORTER

SANTA ROSA -- Richard "Dick" Ghilotti literally has helped reshape the North Bay in his more than 45 years in engineering construction.

He grew up in one of the region's longest operating construction families. Grandfather James Ghilotti started a stone paving business in Marin in 1914 after emigrating from Italy. The company later progressed into road and bridge work and became Ghilotti Brothers Construction, led by Dick Ghilotti's father, Dino, and three brothers.

Dick Ghilotti got his start in the family business at age 13, washing trucks and doing other jobs. After graduating from Marin Catholic High School in 1964, he entered a journeyman trainee program for heavy earthmoving equipment. For the next 10 years, he was an operating engineer, progressing from running equipment to checking grading work to running small and large crews. Much of that work was in Sonoma County for Marin developers.

During that time, he earned an undergraduate degree in finance from Santa Clara University.

At 28, he moved into management as a superintendent. About that time in the mid 1970s, he and his father purchased property on Todd Road in Santa Rosa to establish the company's Santa Rosa office.

In the economic recession during the early 1990s, Ghilotti Brothers and other contractors were consolidating, and Ghilotti Brothers was planning for succession. Dick Ghilotti, operations manager at the time, and cousin Jim Ghilotti split off and started Ghilotti Construction in Santa Rosa in 1992.

From its launch during a recession, Ghilotti Construction has grown, opening an office in San Rafael five years ago. Today at 57, Mr. Ghilotti is owner and president of the third-largest commercial general contractor in the North Bay, according to the BUSINESS JOURNAL's Book of Lists. During the peak of the construction season, the company has some 350 workers, including 50 in administration; 100 pieces of equipment; and 50 trucks on grading, paving, and underground projects in the Bay Area.

Ghilotti Construction generated \$70 million in revenues last year, \$45 million from the Santa Rosa office and \$25 million from San Rafael. Notable current projects include homes on Mare Island in Vallejo for Lennar, a Wal-Mart complex near Oakland International Airport for Simeon Properties, Christopherson Homes' 100-home Gordon Ranch project in Santa Rosa, a few subdivisions in Cloverdale, and Hiddenbrooke subdivision in Vallejo for Triad Communities.

Past projects include a \$60 million renovation of Infineon Raceway, Buck Center for Research in Aging in Novato, Big Rock Ranch for George Lucas, a phase of The Geysers pipeline, and \$10 million in site work at Mayacamas Golf Club.

**Industry outlook:** After weathering the power shortages, the recession, and [the aftermath of] September 11, 2001, I'm very optimistic. There seems to be a lot of demand for engineering contracting these days. When architects and civil and soil engineers are busy, we are busy. We're starting to see winery construction projects return and some commercial building, too. Project owners seem to be investing again. Even with the state budget deficit, there are a lot of public works projects going on, because they're already funded. With bond measures passing and the recall [of Governor Davis], things are a lot better than I thought they would be right now.

**Goals and philosophies:** Personally, I treat everybody as I would expect to be treated. In business, I do a good job and have fun as I build the company's reputation and make money.

**Greatest opportunity:** Sonoma County has a lot of old infrastructure and new residential and industrial developments. There will be great potential when the economy returns.

**Greatest challenges:** I like visiting job sites to meet with clients and workers, but there is a challenge to balancing that with managing the office. For my company and the industry, it is difficult to increase profits in a competitive-bidding environment when materials, fuel, and insurance costs increase so much and so quickly.

**Biggest risk:** Sending workers to job sites surrounded by traffic.

**Favorite tasks:** Finishing a job, getting a pat on the back by the owner, and being able to see it for years.

**Most admired businessperson:** Enzo Ferrari.

**Most wanted to meet:** Enzo Ferrari and President Reagan.

**Current reading:** Let Freedom Ring by Sean Hannity.

**Favorite restaurants:** In Marin, it's Marin Joe's, a contractor's hangout because of quick service. In Sonoma County, Capri is good for client and business lunches.

**Stress reliever:** Boating.

**Words that best describe you:** Easygoing, patient, but Italian (simmering temper).