

Just say Store It: Martin Self Storage

By Tommy Walker



Top: Jim, owner of Martin Self Storage.

Above: There is a relocation center at the store and it is free to the public. It provides a complete list of all apartments in the area, some of the movers, and real estate related items.

When Jim Martin moved to Carolina Beach with his parents some 25 years ago, little did he know the business he started after graduating from Hoggard High School would lead him into one of the nation's most successful self storage businesses.

After graduating, Jim started a roofing and carpentry business in Wilmington. This eventually led to his becoming a contractor, building custom homes and commercial projects. He was quite successful at building the high-end, custom homes and was featured in a North Carolina edition of *Builder/Architect Magazine*. He continued building these homes until 1995.

By the early 1990s, he was already looking for a new challenge, not because he wasn't successful as a contractor, but more because he was looking for something with less overhead. Jim found it. He read an article in *Builder Magazine* that gave him an idea for building a rather unique storage facility.

"I went to see the people who had built the facilities and they were nice enough to show me what they had done," Jim said.

"The idea was to build a storage facility with the main building having the look and feel of residential housing. Since I already knew how to build houses, making the main building look like one was no problem," he said.

The first self storage location was at 6020 Carolina Beach Road and opened April 15, 1994. You might say it was a few years ahead of the time, since the area around Monkey Junction had not yet become the growth area that it is today. But Jim's vision was accurate. The location, with its clean, residential design was a hit. Building a two-story structure that looked more like a residential home stood out and was inviting to customers. It received the Mini-Storage Messenger 1995 Facility of the Year award. This also was featured on the front cover of the *Self Storage Almanac*. After that Jim was asked to be a marketing spokesperson for the Self Storage Association of America.

"I guess I just found my niche," he said.

Jim does his own design work and plans for all of his locations, making each one uniquely different. While each building is of a different design, they all share the same innovations. These include state-of-the-art video security, climate controlled and non-climate controlled units, access to the premises seven days per week, convenient locations designed to accommodate large trucks and full time resident managers. Most of the storage facilities even have individual door alarms. In

addition, Martin Self Storage provides a truck for customers use to move in and sells moving supplies. There is a relocation center at the store and it is free to the public. It provides a complete list of all apartments in the area, some of the movers, and real estate related items. In short they try to provide everything a customer needs for moving and combine that with a very customer friendly environment.

Attesting to the success of his business, in just eight short years, there are now four Martin Self Storage locations in Wilmington with a fifth under construction on Carolina Beach Road near the new Walmart. There is also one location in Fayetteville and a subsidiary location called Stadium Storage in St. Lucie West, Florida across from the New York Mets Spring training facility. In addition to the normal storage, the Florida location offers boat and RV storage.

Why pick a location so far away from Wilmington? "I consulted a friend who built the location and bought it from him because St. Lucie West is one of the fastest growing areas in Florida."

To make the running of the businesses more efficient, each location is responsible for a different function. For example, the Kerr Avenue unit takes care of ordering supplies, the Fayetteville location produces weekly reports and so on. This also helps to bring each individual location together as a team.

In addition to a unique design and other features, Jim feels that his employees are the most important factor in the success of the business.

"My employees are the reason. It is critical that each customer receives the very best service every time. I know that my employees do just that. Believe it or not, this is a highly competitive business and if you don't stay on the cutting edge, you get left behind," he said. "I am up late many nights trying to figure out how to do a better job. I love this business and get up every morning looking forward to each challenge. For me personally, I have always believed that I could be successful and I never thought differently."

What does a person so wrapped up in his work do for fun? "To me, my work is fun but I also like water sports, basketball, physical fitness and I enjoy reading motivational books. I try always to keep a positive attitude," he said.

In the next three to five years, Jim Martin plans to double the size of his business, expanding into South Carolina, Georgia, and other parts of North Carolina and Florida. If you would like to visit their web site, it's: <http://www.martinselfstorage.com>. ■