

# THE Who's Who

IN BUILDING & CONSTRUCTION

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CHARLES H. HODGES  
& SON, INC.  
ESTABLISHED 1934

## A LOADING DOCK LEGACY

*Charles H. Hodges & Son*

INSIDE:

YOUR SPRING  
REGIONAL  
**BUYERS'  
GUIDE!**



Charles H. Hodges Sr. founded  
*Charles H. Hodges & Son Inc.* in 1934.

Photo Credit: Charles H. Hodges & Son

Cover: Jamison Hodges (fourth generation) and  
his uncle, Thomas Hodges (third generation) of  
*Charles H. Hodges & Son*.

Cover Photo Credit: Charles H. Hodges & Son

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# CHARLES H. HODGES & SON

## A LOADING DOCK LEGACY

by Vicki Speed

**C**harles H. Hodges Sr. was an entrepreneur. Born and raised in Baltimore, Md., in the 1920s and 1930s, he quickly learned the challenges associated with moving goods and products to-and-from trucks, trains and other transport systems.

He also saw an opportunity. Charles Sr. became a dealer for conveyors and forklifts while also offering installation and repair services as part of his newly formed company, Charles H. Hodges & Son Inc. While his young son was not yet old enough to formally participate in company activities, Charles Sr. focused on building a legacy, one that he hoped would carry on for generations.

His son—as well as his grandson and great-grandson—have done that and much more. Across four generations, the company has become one of the foremost material equipment handling services in the northeast. And through patents and passion, they have forever changed the way products are lifted, lowered and moved about.



Charles H. Hodges Sr. founded Charles H. Hodges & Son Inc. in 1934.

### **FORKLIFTS, FRIENDS AND FAMILY**

Charles H. Hodges & Son was founded in 1934, but it would be another decade and after World War II before Charles Sr.'s son, Charles Hodges Jr., joined the business.

Following the war, the two men worked closely to expand the business' post-war build-up. Business was going well, though it was about to get much better. In the early 1950s, Gary Kelley invented and manufactured the industry's first dock levelers—hinged steel ramps with a lip that helps bridge the gap between a warehouse loading dock and the flatbed of a truck.

ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF CHARLES H. HODGES & SON



**Charles H. Hodges Sr. traveled around Baltimore selling his installation and repair services throughout the 1930s and 1940s.**

Charles Jr. was an associate of Gary's and thought the dock leveler could really help his customers. He contacted Gary, and soon after, the company became the first loading dock dealer in the country. In fact, one of Charles H. Hodges & Son's clients installed the first dock leveler on the east coast in Baltimore on Key Highway in 1954.

As the market grew for specialty material handling equipment, the company expanded its product line to include freight lifts, fans, pallet racks and even specialized doors used to move raw materials, finished goods, and anything in bulk. They also sold and serviced loading dock equipment, such as dock levelers, scissor lifts, truck restraints, dock seals and shelters, bumpers and lights.

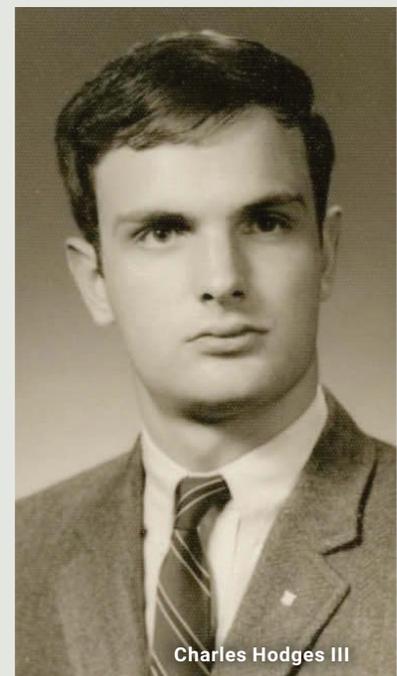
That wasn't quite enough for the Hodges family. Charles Jr.'s son, Charles H. (Charlie) Hodges III, began experimenting with a shop vac, a slab of granite and a trash bag—a combination that would change the specialty material handling market forever.

### THE SHOP VAC PROTOTYPE

Charlie was born to be an engineer. He earned a degree in mechanical engineering and went on to work at an engineering consulting firm for a few years. But his grandfather and father's company called to him. In 1991, he joined Charles H. Hodges & Son as a 50% owner, partnering with his brother, Thomas (Tom) Hodges.



**Charles Hodges Jr.**



**Charles Hodges III**

Within a few weeks of working in the business and learning how the various pieces of material handling equipment and dock equipment function, Charlie put his creative mind to work to redefine the world of dock levelers.

At the time, dock levelers were either manually activated and spring powered or push button activated and hydraulically powered. Charlie invented and patented a new type of dock leveler ... with a little help from his son, Jamison (Jamie).

Jamie, only 11 years old at the time, remembers being pulled out of bed late at night to help his father with the design. He says, "Dad had set a marble slab on top of a trash bag that was connected to a shop vac blower. He told me to stand on the slab. When the vacuum turned on, the bag raised the slab with me on top."

Beyond the enjoyment of his son's laughter as he was lifted into the air, Charlie knew he had just come up with a simplified dock leveler. The large

contact surface area of the bag and steel deck of a leveler meant that only 4-5 psi would be required to operate the lift. With such a system, a one-half horsepower fan motor and cheap vinyl airbag could replace the expensive and complex hydraulic motor/pump assembly and cylinders that were typically used to operate dock levelers.

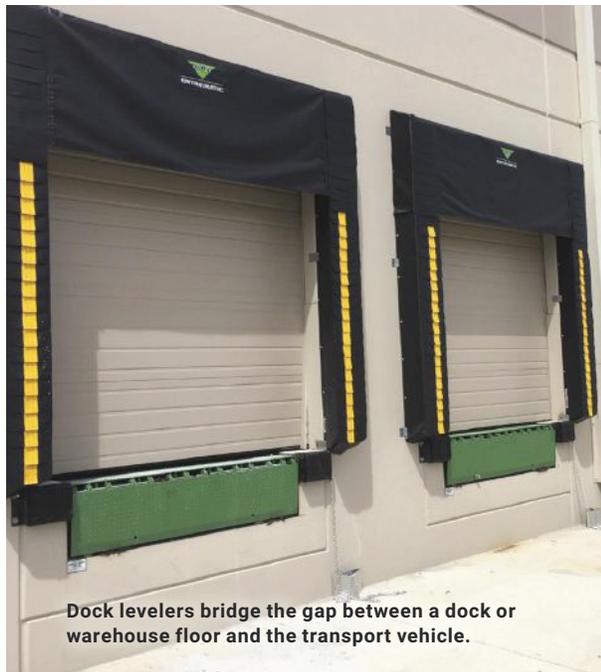
After a licensing agreement with Kelley Co., Charlie's new invention became known as the FX dock leveler. Within two years, the new design became the number one selling powered dock leveler in the world, and is now the specified dock leveler for countless Fortune 500 companies, including Coca Cola, FedEx, Best Buy, Sam's Club and Wal-Mart.

"Few people realize it, but everything around you—your laptop, water bottle, flat screen TV, and even your dog's bed—has likely traveled over a dock leveler before reaching your home," says Jamie.

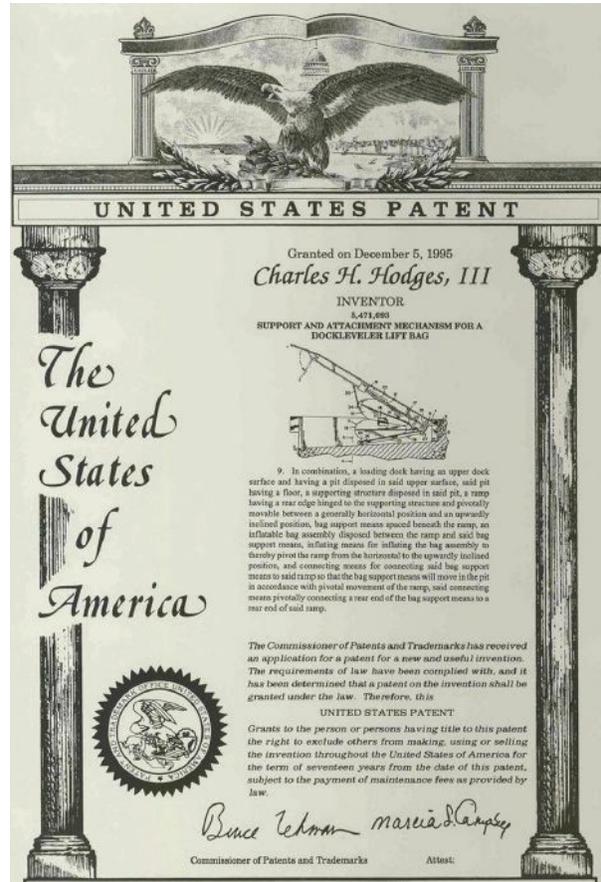
### BUILT ON RELIABILITY

Charlie retired in 2003 and sold his stake in the company to his son Jamie, who had just earned a degree in mechanical engineering from the University of Virginia.

Jamie, the fourth-generation member of the company, and Jamie's uncle, Tom, share administrative and sales duties along with Diane Younger, the Office Manager, and Joe Pizzi, a Salesman.



Dock levelers bridge the gap between a dock or warehouse floor and the transport vehicle.

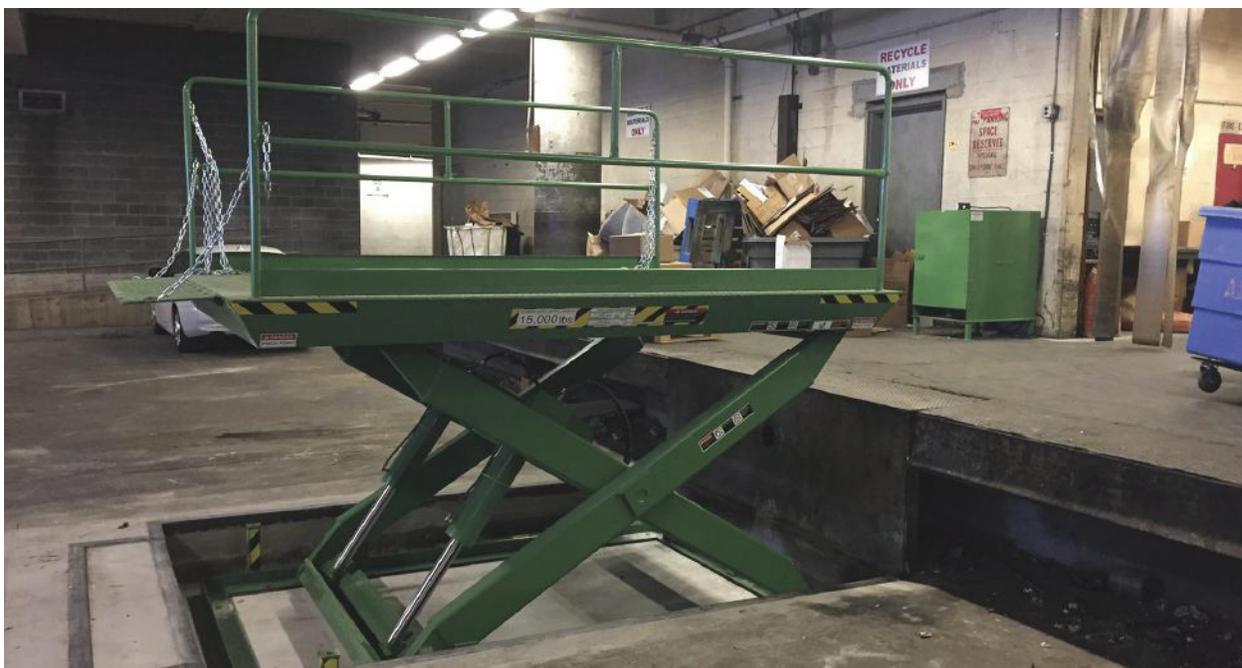


Charles H. (Charlie) Hodges III patented the design for what would become the number one dock leveler in the world.

The company's client list is long and recognizable. Of note, the company outfitted just about every Coca Cola distribution center east of the Mississippi and many USPS locations and food produce centers. As well, Jamie and Tom recently secured the contract for the new Amazon building in Cecil County, Md.

The company has provided turnkey solutions for a variety of commercial and industrial industries, from distribution centers and bottling plants to grocery stores and pharmaceutical labs. The business is the exclusive or semi-exclusive dealer for various manufacturers, including Kelley Co., Entrematic, APS Resource, Albany Door Co., ASSA ABLOY, Amarr doors, Cookson Co. doors, Steele Solutions mezzanines, WireCrafters wire mesh partitioning, Copperloy dock plates and ramps, Hi-Line, and Bulldog Rock Co. pallet racks.

Jamie says, "We have developed special relationships with many commercial real estate developers who need tenant



Charles H. Hodges & Son supplies a range of material handling equipment, such as scissor lifts, truck restraints, dock seals and shelters, bumpers and lights.

improvements to be done quickly and efficiently, and who are looking for a one-stop shop.”

### NEXT GEN EVOLUTION

While Jamie continues to work with his uncle, Tom, to grow the company and meet the needs of existing clients, he’s also continuing his family’s innovative history. He just recently patented a new aftermarket hold-down mechanism for mechanical dock levelers.

Spring-loaded mechanical dock levelers require a hold-down mechanism to keep them in a deployed or stored position. They typically use a ratchet bar and pawl system, which is expensive to manufacture and wears quickly.

Jamie’s hold-down mechanism uses a stainless steel wire mesh grip akin to a Chinese finger trap, which then bites into an aluminum rod. To release the rod, a release lever pushes down on the end of the steel grip, expanding it and freeing the aluminum rod, thus raising the steel deck.

The new hold-down mechanism is designed to fit the various sizes and types of mechanical dock levelers in the market—and it’s significantly cheaper to manufacture and lasts much longer than traditional hold downs. The new product is manufactured and marketed under a separate company called Hodges Industrial LLC ([www.hodgesindustrial.com](http://www.hodgesindustrial.com)).

Jamie and his wife, Lexie (an IT engineer), are likely raising a fifth-generation Hodges owner, entrepreneur and inventor. He’s not sure if his baby girl will have an interest in the company or inventing, but given his family history, the chances are very high.

Jamie is rightfully proud of the legacy that he, his father and uncle have carried on. His great-grandfather would certainly be proud as well. 🐾

*Author Bio: Colorado-based Vicki Speed is a contributing writer with over 25 years of experience, specializing in the AEC industry.*

**Through patents and passion, the Charles H. Hodges family has forever changed the way products are lifted, lowered and moved about.**