



85 years young...

...thompsonbaker

**St. Augustine, 1925.** A team of swarthy builders clocked in for its first day of construction on a new structure soon to be dubbed “the most beautiful bridge in Dixie”—the venerable Bridge of Lions. A stone’s throw away, moneyed tourists sipped tea in the tropical courtyard of the Ponce de Leon Hotel. And a young Georgia Tech graduate named Harold Ryman, visiting The Oldest City, had a change of heart...

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**R**yman had been headed to South America for romance and adventure. But his good friend, St. Augustine resident John Thompson, was presenting a convincing argument: “Stay in St. Augustine,” Thompson said. “Real estate is going for pennies. There’s money to be made here.”

Ryman listened. And then he looked, out across the Matanzas Bay to where acres of land stood pristine, waiting. Tampa developer David P. Davis was in liquidation mode, given the bust of the Florida land boom, and he was selling off huge tracts of land in the area now known as Davis Shores. Thompson and Ryman saw the opportunity and acted on it, buying up plum Anastasia Island properties—800 lots, to be exact. To say the land acquisition was fortuitous would be a gross understatement: the partners bought all the parcels for a total of \$7,000 (but then had to address \$100,000 in back taxes). The equity on the land would then fund the partners’ next venture: the Thompson-Ryman Insurance and Real Estate Agency.

Does the name sound familiar? It should. The Thompson-Ryman Agency was the eighty-five-year-

old grandfather of today’s ThompsonBaker Agency, an insurance and financial services company which, single-handedly, has seen more of the evolution and development of modern St. Augustine than arguably any other business in the region. Just look at the agency’s client list to see the institutions they’ve been insuring all these years: Flagler Hospital, Arnett Heating and Air-Conditioning, A.D. Davis Construction, Marine Oil Supply, even the relative newcomer Flagler College. These are some of St. Augustine’s oldest and most well-known entities, and they’re still served, today, by one of St. Augustine’s most respected and well-known insurance agencies.

The stories and memories are everywhere. Just ask Greg Baker, who signed on with the agency in 1970, joining partners Pierre Thompson—John Thompson’s son—and John D. Bailey. Pierre Thompson had joined the agency in 1950, continuing a long history of Thompson family business leadership in St. Augustine (Pierre’s grandfather, in fact, was an early developer of The St. Augustine Record, along with co-investor Henry Flagler). John D. Bailey arrived in town and joined the agency in 1954 to continue his

own long and distinguished career of achievement and philanthropy. Thompson and Bailey formed the second generation of the firm’s leadership until Baker joined their ranks. Together, the three men steered the agency through evolutions, expansions and relocations to various addresses in the city. In the late nineties, the agency reorganized and segmented into separate entities, with John and his son Mark starting The Bailey Group to focus on life and health insurance and Pierre and Paul Thompson starting Thompson Realty and Development to focus on the real estate arena. Today Mark and Paul, with their own companies, continue the traditions of success and community service inspired by their fathers.

## WHAT’S IN A NAME?

It’s **ThompsonBaker**, Matt Baker, son of Greg, reminds his clients. Some of them, he notices, are still referring to the company by its old moniker: Thompson-Bailey-Baker, and it’s hard to teach some of St. Augustine’s oldest dogs new tricks. As Greg Baker recalls, “when I joined what was then called Thompson-Bailey, in 1970, many people still referred to us as Thompson-



Agency founded by partners John Thompson and Harold Ryman; business located at 116 Charlotte Street.

Agency moves to 8 Cathedral Place.

John D. Bailey becomes partner.

Pierre Thompson becomes partner.

Agency moves to 31 Cordova Street.

1925

1930s

1940s

1950

1954

1956

1957

1970

1970s

1989

Agency moves to The Bishop Building, 44 Cathedral Place.

John Thompson’s son Pierre joins agency; John Thompson retires.

Harold Ryman retires.

Greg Baker becomes partner.

Agency moves to current location, 61 Cordova Street.

Ryman.” But the personality and integrity of the agency transcends its name, and anyone who has ever done business with the firm knows that no matter the name, the principals are still the same authentic, friendly, smart professionals they’ve always been.

Greg Baker recalls the evolution of the agency’s name through the years. “When I became a partner in the mid 1970’s there was no discussion about changing the name. None at all. But then one day Pappy Schilling, the ‘voice of St. Augustine’ on WFOY radio and a character known by all, started running announcements for “Thompson-Bailey-Baker.” Baker smiles at the memory. “I called him up right away, told him, ‘Pappy, that’s not the name of the company.’ But he didn’t care. He said, ‘I’m not changing it unless John Bailey tells me to.’ Stubborn guy—and when I came with my hat in my hands to tell John what was happening, he laughed and said, ‘Let it go.’ He figured it was easier to change the name of the agency than to change Pappy Schilling.”

And here’s a few more names that might ring a bell with long-time St. Augustine residents, a roster of the many local residents who, through the years,

worked with the agency in one of their many different downtown locations: Art Fisher, Dot Delaney, Elaine Goode, Muriel Braddock, Tom Mickler, Jim Browning, Mike Norman, Helen Morrison, Anne Curtis, Brenda Ashton, Frank Harold, Esther Angwin and Ansley Hall. (“Oh, Art Fisher,” Pierre Thompson remembers. “We had to buy the whole Cooley Agency just to get Art Fisher!”)

The agency acquired many other local agencies along its path to growth, purchasing, through the years, The Cooley Agency, The Andy Russell Agency, Curtain-Calhoun, The Verle Pope Agency and The Ansley Hall Agency.

“Curtain-Calhoun was a great ally and a healthy competitor of ours back in the day,” Greg Baker recalls. “We used to be right next door to each other on Cathedral Place, and we were often competing for the same prospects. But the funny thing about this town, back then, was how close everyone was. I remember once when Put Calhoun was headed out for a vacation, and he popped next door to ask us at Thompson-Bailey if we could assist his staff in looking after his clients while he was gone! That’s just how we did business then.”

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Greg Baker

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Dan Alexander joins agency.

Alan Bratic joins agency.

Dan Alexander becomes partner.

Agency celebrates 85th birthday.

1998

2002

2006

1991

2001

2002

2010

Greg Baker’s son Matt joins agency.

Matt Baker becomes partner.

Alan Bratic becomes financial services partner.





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#### **MAKING IT WORK.**

Any organization that weathers 85 years of political, economic and social changes is a remarkable entity. ThompsonBaker has weathered them all, from the civil unrest of the 1960's to economic recessions, real estate bubbles and urban sprawl.

"I recall 1964 being a very difficult time for our business in St. Augustine," John Bailey remembers. "Between the Civil Rights unrest and the destruction of Hurricane Dora—it was a tough year."

At various times during the agency's life, principals turned to real estate, investments and other initiatives to keep the business on a path toward growth. Even family members pitched in. At one point, Pierre Thompson's mother, Suzette, taught French lessons to the patrons of the Ponce De Leon Hotel from her Abbott Tract home to earn extra income for support of the agency. But always, remembers Greg Baker, the agency's principals tempered their business ambitions with a solid, salt-of-the-earth appreciation for their families, their friends and the community they called home.

"One time in the early seventies we were driving over the Bridge of Lions, Pierre Thompson and I," remembers Greg Baker. "And Pierre said, 'I want to show you something.' He drove us over Davis Shores to an empty lot on the inlet, and we got out of the car. I thought we were going to look at the lot and discuss it as a real estate acquisition or listing. Instead, he opened the trunk and took out a pair of fishing poles. He'd seen the blues running when we came over the bridge. So we rolled up our shirtsleeves and fished for an hour." Baker smiles. "That's what it's been like, having this agency in this town."

#### **LOOKING TO THE FUTURE.**

Agency principals today are proud of their history and even more excited about their future. Partners Matt Baker and Dan Alexander, both born and raised in St. Augustine, continue to build upon the agency's history while looking for new ways to grow, to expand their offerings and to keep up with technology. Alan Bratic, Greg's son-in-law, who is partners with Greg on the financial services side of the agency, is a Flagler College graduate and a native of Croatia; he brings an international savvy to the agency's services that enhances the insights of the local partners. ThompsonBaker is well-known as an agency that gives back to the community through a variety of civic and philanthropic organizations. On staff at ThompsonBaker, through the years, have been two mayors, multiple Flagler Hospital trustees, Rotary and Kiwanis presidents, Boy Scout leaders, Chamber of Commerce board members—and the list goes on. "It's a very exciting time for us," Baker says. "This year we're celebrating our 85th anniversary in style, with an updated logo and website, some new services, and lots of real gratitude for the years of hard work and focus that made this company what it is today. There could never be a ThompsonBaker that didn't honor its heritage. But there will also never be a ThompsonBaker that doesn't value its future. It's a fantastic place to be."



**tb** | thompsonbaker  
Because it's your future.