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Saturday, September 16, 2006

Bassett marks 70 years service

Kaukauna firm's success driven by innovation

By Larry Avila

Post-Crescent business editor

KAUKAUNA — Bill Bassett said if his uncle still were alive he wouldn't recognize the business.

"I think he (Al) would be a little shocked," said Bassett, who has operated Bassett Mechanical Contractors and Engineers since 1974. He, along with his father, Charlie, bought the business from Al Bassett, who launched the company in 1936, focusing on refrigeration systems.

After 70 years, refrigeration still is a focus at Bassett, though the company also designs, builds and installs heating and cooling systems and offers fabrication and engineering services.

Dozens of company friends, vendors and customers turned out for the firm's anniversary celebration Friday.

Bill Bassett was at the door greeting visitors. Many said to Bassett that they enjoyed hearing his voice on the company's automated answering system.

"You'll get a live person when you call in during regular hours, but when you call after hours, it is my voice on the system," he said.

Bassett, who studied chemical engineering at Michigan Technological University, said the company has grown considerably since he and his father acquired it from his uncle. The company employed 32 people at the time but today now has about 300 workers.

Company representatives led tours of the company's massive 180,000-square-foot manufacturing area. Workers carried about their daily business as visitors walked past raw materials including sheet metal, valves and other components that laid in wait to be assembled into a component.

Ryan Winebaugh, a member of Bassett's sales staff, said the company's diving bells are a growing part of its business. Some of their models are capable of reaching depths of 1,000 feet and can withstand pressures up to 450 pounds per square inch.

He couldn't disclose specific customers but noted that some buyers included oil companies with drilling rigs in the Gulf Coast region. The diving bells are being used to repair oil lines damaged during last year's hurricane season.

"We're a lot more diversified than just doing duct work," Winebaugh said.

Jack Koby, an account executive with Climate Control Co. Inc., Green Bay, has worked with Bassett for 20 years and also has toured the firm's plant on numerous occasions. His firm helps businesses increase efficiencies in their heating and cooling systems.

"I've been to their facility at least four times, and it still impresses me what they do," he said. "Bill is a laid-back person and it shows in their business, which is probably why so many of his employees stay with him."



B. Bassett