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Distributors of America's Finest Plumbing & Heating Supplies

Dedication to customers differentiates Banner Plumbing

BY TRACIE E. DARNELL
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Lee Greenspon says to have a successful business you need to treat the customer as you'd like to be treated and hire a quality staff that commits to that philosophy. It's working for his company, now in its 60th year, with 2005 sales topping \$30 million. Greenspon is the president and owner of Buffalo Grove-based Banner Plumbing Supply Co. Inc., a wholesale distributor of plumbing supplies that serves Chicago, its suburbs, northwest Indiana and southern Wisconsin. He said his company has succeeded because it provides superior service from a staff that is second to none. Diane Thomas of Barry Thomas Plumbing in Lisle, who's been buying from Banner Plumbing for 16 years, said it's her favorite supply house. "I never have a problem finding a person to help me with any issue I am having," Thomas said.

According to Thomas, it's Banner's service and employees that set the company apart from competitors. "They have the best customer service," Thomas said.

Going above and beyond for the customer is standard procedure at Banner Plumbing. "If a mistake is made," Greenspon said, "we think nothing of sending a truck and a driver to correct the mistake that day or within an hour if possible, instead of taking an extra day to deliver materials that the customer needs now."

"Once we got a call at 3:30 p.m. on a weekday afternoon from Althoff Industries," said Gene Hara, executive vice president of Banner Plumbing. "They needed to have a commercial heater installed by 8 a.m. the next morning. We had a driver come in at 4:30 a.m. so we could make the delivery by 5 a.m., so the plumber would have enough time to complete the job by the 8 a.m. deadline."

Greenspon stresses that the customers always come first in all situations and everyone that works for him knows that motto.

More than half of Banner Plumbing's 70 employees have been with the company five years or more, with several members of the staff employed for more than 10 years.

"We treat our employees extremely well," Greenspon said. "The people that work here come here because they enjoy what they do. I have one employee that has been here for 26 years. He graduated on Friday and came to work on Monday and has been here ever since."

Greenspon's father, Charles Greenspon, set the business in motion when only 15 years old. "My father started the company with \$500 of borrowed money," Greenspon said. "He was befriended by another man who lived across the street and owned a plumbing supply store. The deal was my dad could take out any material he wanted and sell it at the man's store and then he would pay the man for it." Banner Plumbing opened its doors in 1947 in a small three-flat building on the South Side of Chicago. With six employees, the company prided itself on supplying quality-plumbing materials direct to the jobsite. Lee Greenspon took over the company in 1990 and began to expand operations. He now has more than 70 employees and 20 delivery trucks. He built a larger building on the South Side to replace the original three-flat his father started and opened up a new 58,000-square-foot building in Buffalo Grove. The operations in Buffalo Grove allowed Greenspon to cater to his growing customers in the north and northwest suburbs, such as MG Mechanical in Woodstock and Heritage Plumbing in Hoffman Estates. The company is continuing to expand further into Buffalo Grove in December by moving to a 124,000-square-foot building that includes a 10,000 square foot

showroom. The showroom will house the newest lines of decorative plumbing fixtures and hardware. "Banner recognized a need in the industry for customers to see and actually experience many of the products that are new to the industry," Hara said. "The showroom should open up a new avenue of exposure to us," Hara said.

"It will make our name more recognizable to not just the professional industry, but to the industry as a whole." As it expands, Banner continues to operate its South Side office. The continuing success there "has always been to me like the eighth wonder of the world," Greenspon said. "The business has survived at least a half dozen other businesses, both wholesale and retail, that have come and gone in that time period, and we have survived in stiff competition. It all goes back to treating the customer how I would treat myself, and it works, and I have always believed that."

According to Hara, working for Banner Plumbing is a dream. "Lee is a great boss and a great owner of the company," Hara said. "He gives the employees whatever we need. He gives us the freedom and the ability to do what is best for the company. It is almost unrealistic to expect such an opportunity because it is not common."

Greenspon remains modest, however, stating, "If I have any good quality at all, it has been the ability to pick the best people to work for me. I have been very blessed."