



one on one

DOUG BERWICK

By Rob Larimer
rob.larimer@csbj.com

Doug Berwick is CEO of Berwick Electric Co., which was founded in Colorado Springs and has operated as a family-owned business for three generations.

From the beginning, the company has managed to remain on the cutting edge of technology, from the dawn of in-home electricity to energy specifications for chip manufacturers to electric power in the information age.

Berwick took some time recently to talk to the Business Journal about his business, its history and how it has remained financially viable.

Give us a brief history of your company and tell us how you became involved and what your role is now.

In 1921 my grandfather, John Douglas Berwick, began converting homes from gas and oil to electricity, working out of the carriage house behind his home on Weber Street. Soon, he was busy wiring new homes and buildings downtown. In 1946 my father, James Douglas Berwick, returned from the Navy and joined his father at Berwick Electric, and they later worked on Camp Carson, which became Fort Carson in 1954.

I graduated from Kansas State University in 1986 with a degree in Construction Science and began a 10-year succession plan along with three long-time Berwick employees to purchase my father's stock in anticipation of his retirement. Jim Peterson, who began his career at Berwick as an apprentice electrician under my father, is now our president. Our succession plan continues to evolve as we consider those who will be part of the fourth generation of corporate leadership.

I currently am CEO and oversee all of our finance, marketing and administration.

How many employees do you have? Is the company's employee base growing or has it scaled back?

We have approximately 100 employees and we have seen consistent growth over the past four years. Our service department requires a larger office staff than most contractors our size in order for us to deliver the level of customer satisfaction that we demand.

Our size has varied over the years depending on the size and timing of projects. We've employed as many as 250 electricians when needed for a customer's project. We had one project for a high-tech customer that required us to provide over 100 electricians over a 24-hour period to do a preventative maintenance shutdown.

What portion of the electrical market does Berwick specialize in? Where does most of your revenue come from?

Over the past seven years, the majority of our work has been in the public sector, working on federal projects at military installations and local governmental entities such as schools and utility projects. On the private side, much of our work has been at health care facilities. Our industrial division has seen the most growth but has also required us to do most of this work in other states, which has its own set of challenges.

Our service department, which serves both residential and commercial customers, has remained fairly consistent during the past few years, but our DataComm division has seen steady growth. Our service fleet can be on-site rapidly with a large-scale response of both equipment and manpower when one of our customers has an off-hours emergency.

What were some key factors that helped Berwick weather the recent recession?

Our greatest asset at Berwick Electric Company is our reputation and the long-term employees who have helped us earn it. We hire individuals who are proud of the work that they perform, either in the office or in the field, and they treat our customers in a professional manner. The majority of work that we completed during the recession was performed for repeat customers who continued to rely on us to deliver the best quality and value for their dollar.

Diversification has also played a big role in our success over the long run. In the '80s and '90s we specialized in high tech chip manufacturing facilities and the associated clean rooms. As we witnessed this work going overseas we began concentrating on healthcare and government projects.

Industrial work has required us to invest heavily in tools and equipment specific to that type of work. DataComm work has required us to gain numerous certifications and invest heavily in training and technology, constantly striving to be on the cutting edge while avoiding the bleeding edge of technology.

What are some of the advantages and challenges about doing business in Colorado Springs?

Colorado Springs is a very competitive market. You have to educate your customers on what sets you apart from your competition. We have a very technically sophisticated base of customers with the defense contractors, technology companies, higher education facilities and utility/industrial facilities. These customers expect us to continually be learning new technologies and investing in the equipment associated with it.

Our advantage is our history of giving back to our community and reputation for quality service, but we are very aware that we cannot rest on our past and must constantly be improving ourselves as we prepare for the future. • CSBJ

You have to educate your customers on what sets you apart from your competition.