

Berwick Electric celebrates 90 years of adapting to changing markets

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[Berwick Electric](#) has survived the many booms and busts of the Colorado Springs economy, becoming one of the city's top electrical contractors by adapting to a constantly changing market.

It's an approach that should serve the company well as a flurry of work at Fort Carson winds down.

The Colorado Springs-based company celebrated its 90th anniversary Wednesday, thanking its 90 employees with a barbecue dinner and looking back on the highlights of nearly a century of history — from the installation of some of the first electric fixtures in homes to wiring data centers that house corporate computer systems. During those 90 years, the company thrived through

building booms and rode out downturns by finding new markets ranging from hospitals and clean rooms to power plants and military buildings.

"We have been able to grow when we needed to in order to handle large projects as well as respond quickly and right-size ourselves and keep our core group together. The people we have now are the real core of the company and the key to our success," said Doug Berwick, treasurer of Berwick Electric and the only remaining member of the Berwick family still involved in the business. "I think that my father and grandfather would be proud of where we have taken this company while staying true to our core values of customer service."

J. Douglas Berwick started the company in 1921 after he converted the lighting system in his family's home from gas to electricity. His neighbors saw the results and soon hired the company to do the same conversion for their homes. During the early years, Berwick Electric worked on the construction of downtown's Grace Episcopal Church, the original St. Francis Hospital near downtown and the Modern Woodmen of America sanatorium (now the Mount Saint Francis convent) in northwest Colorado Springs.

The company has been the electrical subcontractor for many of the highest profile projects in the Springs, including the Holly Sugar Building downtown, The Broadmoor hotel's Colorado Hall in southwest Colorado Springs and the Shepard's/McGraw-Hill office building on the city's far north end.

Berwick Electric also developed a niche in building out the electric systems for clean rooms used in semiconductor plants, including local facilities for Atmel Corp. and Ramtron International Corp. That business disappeared as semiconductor manufacturing moved mostly to Pacific Rim nations, prompting the company to find a new niche in health care and leading to its largest job ever as electrical subcontractor for the 2007 construction of the \$207 million St. Francis Health Center in northeast Colorado Springs. More than a third of Berwick Electric's 300 employees at that time worked on the St. Francis project, which accounted for a major part of the company's record \$32 million in revenue that year.

Through the latest housing crisis, the company has thrived by winning work at Fort Carson, where the company has completed more than 50 jobs in the past five years, according to Berwick President Jim Peterson. More than 60 percent of the \$10.2 million in work Berwick has booked so far this year comes from 10 projects at Fort Carson. Much of that work is winding down, though additional projects are likely for a new aviation brigade coming to the post in 2013, so the company has expanded into work on power and water treatment plants.

"We are always seeking out markets that are expanding so we can shift gears and chase those markets," said Tim Prime, a Berwick Electric vice president. "To do industrial work (power and water plants), we had

to be willing to pursue opportunities outside this area. We have done work coast to coast, including Florida, Washington, Oregon, Illinois, Missouri, Minnesota and Wisconsin. Some of our Department of Defense work has been global, including projects in Alaska, Norway and Spain."

As military budget cuts seem inevitable in the next few years, Doug Berwick hopes that the commercial construction market will rebound. That way the company can shift gears yet again and keep its staff intact by winning work on office buildings, shopping centers, hotels and other such projects.

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