

Dale Oxygen marks 75th year

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JOHNSTOWN - Now in its third generation, being a family owned and operated business is a sense of strong pride for the Bennear family which has run Dale Oxygen since 1939.

The company started by Harry W. Bennear in the Dale section of Johnstown - hence the name Dale Oxygen - is marking its 75th year in business.

During the 1930's, Harry W. was a welder working in the Pittsburgh area, and in 1937 he moved to Johnstown to work alongside a close relative for the Air Reduction Co. Through connections to the Air Reduction Co., he became an authorized Airco distributor and opened up his own business.

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He started out by selling and delivering oxygen and acetylene gas cylinders, oxy/fuel torches and welding electrodes for welding and cutting applications.

"He saw a demand for welding and cutting gas and equipment for the local steel mills," said grandson Evan Benneer, sales manager.

Dale Oxygen still offers the same products it did 75 years ago, but the business has grown.

"We have added to our capabilities over the years to include all products and services that relate to all welding and cutting processes. Advancements in industrial and fabrication technology has allowed us to work with automation and robotics, bulk gas supply systems, medical and research applications and safety needs for power generation stations and the shale industry," Evan Benneer said.

The business has moved twice over the years - to the West End in 1953 and to its present Hornerstown location in 1963 - because of the need for more space.

Today the main office and fill plant encompass 6,000 square feet and the main warehouse encompasses 14,000 square feet.

Plans are in the works to double the fill plant capabilities and office space.

The largest part of the company's customer base is comprised of fabricators and manufacturers, said Harry W.'s grandson, Chris Benneer, operations and IT manager.

"We deal with a lot of fabricators and manufacturers, auto shops, medical facilities and power plants. We sell welding machines for the weekend warrior, as well as major companies. We sell safety gloves and jackets. We sell it all. We also sell and deliver medical gas to doctor's offices and hospitals, and rare and specialty gases to places like power plants," Chris Benneer said.

Dale Oxygen has truly been a family business over the years.

Harry W.'s sons, Dale and Harry D. Benneer joined the business alongside their father and mother during the 1970's. Dale Benneer died in 1990 and Harry D. Benneer took on the role of president and still holds this position today. In 1990, Harry D.'s wife Mary Ann joined the operation and took on the similar roles that Ruth (Harry W.'s wife) Benneer handled (managing the books etc.) as well as managing the human resources department.

Harry D. Benneer's two sons joined the gas and welding supply business: Chris Benneer in 1993 and Evan Benneer in 2004.

Dale Oxygen opened branch locations in Indiana in 1998 and in Altoona in 2000.

"We saw a change in the competitive landscape in those areas and a growing need for a full service gas and welding distributor," Evan Benneer said. "Our service model and the solutions

we provide allowed us to acquire new business in those areas and has allowed us to serve long-term customers even more efficiently."

Dale Oxygen has been delivering from its Indiana location for a few years and this month began offering delivery service from its Altoona location.

"Anything that we sell we can deliver to our customers from all three locations," Chris Bennear said.

"We pride ourselves on having three fully stocked locations, a service model that is second to none, extremely low employee turnover, a staff that is technically educated and trained in the welding and manufacturing industries and a complete approach that provides welding solutions to help our customers run a better and more profitable operation," Evan Bennear said.

Providing top-notch customers service from knowledgeable employees - the company employs 28 today - has been a key to Dale Oxygen's success.

"We have a lot of very dedicated employees with a lot of years of service," Chris Bennear said.

The Bennears are optimistic about the future of the business.

"We have a growth model in place that encompasses hiring more local workers, adding to our distribution capabilities, expanding our cylinder fill plant facilities and opening additional branches to cover an even greater geographical territory," Evan Bennear said.