



HD Supply Waterworks open in New Britain

Hydrants are stocked according to each customer's specifications

Bobby D'Onofrio is excited about his new job. As many readers will remember, Bobby doesn't change jobs very often, having been with the New Britain Water Department for 33 years and then with EPPCO Ferguson for another 20. But when Ed Michalek, asked him to "come along and help out" when Ed became New England District Manager at HD Supply Waterworks, Bobby just couldn't resist the challenge.

The challenge for Ed, Bobby and Manager Robin Ford was that there wasn't any HD Supply Waterworks presence in New England. They would have to build the company from the ground up and beginning in January of this year, that's exactly what they did.

If you are going to serve the needs of public and private water utilities, contractors and others in the water supply and treatment business, you need to have great inventory and you need a convenient, centrally located place to keep it, so the location of the first new facility was critical.

Ed Michalek was born and raised in New Britain and after looking at a lot of buildings all over Connecticut, he chose the former Tuttle & Bailey factory in his old hometown. While the building had been vacant for years and needed complete rehabilitation, it was close to Interstate 84 and at 22,000 sq. ft., was big enough to house HD Supply Waterworks' complete inventory of fittings, valves, meters, hydrants and more inside, out of the weather. Only Ductile iron, plastic and polyethylene

pipe are stored outside on the one acre yard.

Of course, building and staffing a new company in just five months (HD Supply Waterworks opened in May) isn't easy without the backing of a large and financially stable organization and HD Supply is just that.

Started in 1997 by The Home Depot, HD Supply grew rapidly, at least partially by acquiring 43 companies by the end of 2007. In 2008, HD Supply was sold to a group of private equity investors. The company has continued to grow and now operates 11 lines of business, one of which is HD Supply Waterworks and another being the widely used USA Bluebook. In the waterworks area alone, HD Supply now has 230 locations in 43 states. But they didn't have a presence in New England and that became Ed Michalek and his team's challenge.

Current plans call for 8 to 12 New England locations by 2014. Already, there are HD Supply Waterworks branches in Dedham and Brockton, Massachusetts and a newly opened branch at 295 Hancock Avenue in Bridgeport.

HD Supply Waterworks boasts about its "tenured" team and as Michalek explains it, that term means that the company employs the best, most experienced people it can find. "In this business, people buy from people," Michalek says. "It's not only about the company, but the people inside it that really matter."



HD Supply Waterworks' New Britain facility has 12,000 sq. ft. of space, allowing virtually all inventory to be stored inside.



The inside sales team at work. (l to r) Cubby Thompson, Sean O'Donnell and Anthony Borselli



The Grand Opening of HD Supply Waterworks in New Britain was in May of this year.



Treatment Plant Manager Jason Reed and Robin Ford, Branch Manager Connecticut.

Supplying the Waterworks industry is a highly competitive business and having the backing of a company the size of HD Supply makes all the difference. Connecticut Manager Robin Ford points out that with that backing, they have enormous buying power and can handle all of a customer's needs. HD Supply also handles the accounts payable and receivable functions as well as human resources and payroll from its headquarters in St. Louis.

Converting an old factory to a modern wholesale showroom and distribution center in just a few months wasn't an easy task. The building at One Hartford Square was gutted and new office space and a showroom built. The rehab effort made the most of the former factory space by including large floor-to-ceiling shelving units along one side and providing areas where inventory can be stored by category and staged for delivery on pallets along the other side.

Jason Reed manages the Treatment Plant Division, which is located on the eastern side of the building with its own dedicated office and warehouse space. HD has partnered exclusively with US Pipe and other vendors in growing the Plant Division market.

The HD Supply Waterworks facility opened in May and now has 16 employees and those employees are the operation's biggest asset says Robin Ford. "Every one of them knew us and wanted to work here," she says. "That makes a tremendous difference."

Of course, having an efficient warehouse is one thing but in the waterworks industry, delivering orders accurately and on time is even more important. To accomplish that, HD Supply Waterworks operates six delivery trucks up to 10-12 hours a day and even longer if necessary. Deliveries are made throughout Connecticut and the logistics involved in getting the best use out of those trucks every day have been perfected.

HD Supply Waterworks is also a 24-7 operation. Calls are answered and arrangements made to get the needed material in the customer's hands as quickly as possible regardless of the time of day.

Economic benefit

Ed Michalek says that he received a lot of cooperation from the City of New Britain when he was searching for a suitable building to house the new HD Supply Waterworks Connecticut facility. "We're definitely a plus for New Britain," Michalek says, "not just because we brought 16 new jobs to the city but because we have a really positive economic influence. For instance, we buy our food and fuel here, we hire local contractors and of course, pay taxes here. We're not a start-up, but part of a very successful American company that is only going to grow."

Michalek has a lot on his plate right now and he leaves the operation of the New Britain facility to Robin Ford, who has more than 25 years in the waterworks supply business. Ed's job is to fully build out HD Supply Waterworks in New England within the next three years. That could include up to 12 locations and might even include acquisitions. He's looking for a sizeable market share by 2014 and given the complexity of opening even one facility, that's going to be a lot of work.

"When we open a new HD Supply Waterworks location, we have to start at the bottom and prove ourselves and that's where our people come in. They're always willing to work a little harder, and that makes all the difference," Michalek says.

Michalek goes on to note that having the backing of a large national company also allows them to understand what customers need and then invest in those parts and materials so that they are available when they are needed.

"If a small utility needs a particular type of hydrant, they need it now, not in a week." We have to be able to supply that hydrant from our stock and get it to them in hours, not days," Michalek says. "That's the kind of service our customers expect and we're geared up to provide it, every time.

Meanwhile, "Bobby D" D'Onofrio is on the road, telling that to utility and municipal officials, some of whom he has known for decades. "They trust me," D'Onofrio says. "If I say HD Supply Waterworks has what they need and can deliver it on time, they know they can count on it." 💧