



Enchanted in New Mexico

Father/son team builds success in Santa Fe

36

To understand this contracting firm, let's define the word enchantment. Enchantment is all about captivation, a feeling of wonder for something unusual and exciting. Of course, New Mexico's "Land of Enchantment" theme helps to set the stage.

The base camp for Enchantment Refrigeration is a few miles outside of Santa Fe. A closer look shows that the company fits the description well. There's a sense of wonder and curiosity in all that they do.

With a total of six employees, Enchantment is a father/son-managed operation with some very interesting twists and turns. Note their fondness for all things mechanical or the R-60-insulated, "belly-up" shop they built or Dad's insistence that before he'd install

new, super-efficient HVAC systems in a customer's home he'd first test it in his own home. Then there's the 13-foot long, über-customized motorcycle that son Leroy's been known to take out for estimates.

The Santa Fe area is in the cool, semi-arid climate zone, characterized by frigid winters and hazy, hot summers (very hot). A typical day in July may start as a 50°F morning, peak at 100°F midday and soften to 70°F by nightfall. The next day could start colder and hit near-griddle temps by afternoon. Customer demands, and tempers, flare with the rigors of an ever-changing weatherscape, so, of course, the equipment Enchantment installs must be up to the challenge.

In the beginning

Joe Salazar began the business in 1984. His son, Leroy, joined the following year, after graduating with a B.A. degree in operations management from New Mexico State University. "From day one, my dad insisted that I go to college before I could get close to the company," Leroy explained. "It was for my own benefit."

Joe Salazar knew what it was like to be in the trade without the advantage of a formal college education. He entered the field in 1961, right after high school and worked for an HVAC firm that provided him with a firm foundation and hands-on experience. As a master journeyman, and after 21 years of loyal work for the company, Joe's salary topped off at a mere \$9.75 an hour. It was time to move on.



Joe Salazar performing routine maintenance inspection on one of the five one-ton Fujitsu heat pumps installed in a Santa Fe residence

Initially, Salazar was hesitant to put all his eggs in one basket. "I wanted to create a full service company," Joe said, "so we opened up shop." The company started out in Joe's garage. A few years later, as the business grew, they outgrew the garage office.

Today, Enchantment's home base is a super-efficient, 1,600-square foot, radiantly-heated structure with four different heating zones powered by an 80 MBH Laars MiniTherm boiler, two Taco 007 circulators and five zone valves. Having acquired a wide variety of metal fabrication and mechanical equipment to plow through all types and varieties of plumbing and mechanical and HVAC jobsite demands, it's safe to say the Salazars can set aside those early concerns about placing all the eggs in one basket.

Clients of Enchantment Refrigeration always get a custom fit system for whatever their needs may be. "We design and fabricate heating and cooling systems for a wide range of residential and commercial customer needs," explained Leroy. "Today, as we've expanded and diversified, our territory, range and focus can stay on track with seasonal work. And with contracted residential and commercial maintenance work, our employees have a steady source of work year round."

New installs, maintenance contracts

Contributing to the steady source of work for Enchantment's crews are the maintenance contracts they hold with many companies and schools in the area.

At the Pojoaque Valley Schools in Santa Fe, Enchantment Refrigeration has been contracted to perform regular quarterly maintenance checks for the past 16 years at all campuses. Enchantment maintains equipment installed by previous contractors. They've also replaced equipment and installed new technology as well, including Taco recirculating pumps at the senior high campus.

Just a short distance away, at Santa Fe's K-4 campus, they know that mechanical systems are ready for routine maintenance work. They arrive to clean and service Laars boilers, lubricate large Taco recirculating pump stations and oil Taco pump motors.

"There are very few HVAC systems we don't work with or install," said Leroy. "We favor equipment manufactured by Taco, Watts, Fujitsu and Laars. Their systems hold up real well, even in a harsh environment like ours."

Enchantment Refrigeration prefers to steer potential customers in the right direction based on personal experience with the products they're installing. "We install the products in our homes first to make sure that what we're selling works just as it's promised to do," said Leroy.

Last year, Enchantment installed a three-ton Fujitsu system in Joe's home. "We prefer Fujitsu because their products hold up so well, are extremely energy efficient, and the



Irvin Marin, service technician, cleaning filters on the indoor Fujitsu pump in Joe Salazar's home

technical support is among the best we've found. Our rep in Albuquerque, Madeline Schultz, is always available if we need her," explained Leroy.

In a typical year, Enchantment may install 30 Fujitsu mini-split systems. Though, last year, they installed 50. "We vary widely from residential to commercial, from the smallest single-zone units at 9,000 Btus to multi-zone systems with a huge assortment of air-handling options that include wall units and ceiling cassettes."

Leroy says that the air-to-air heat pumps have impressed them most. The systems still provided heat when record-breaking lows tumbled into the -20 F range last winter. "Homes were still getting heat. Not a single customer complained that their homes weren't warm enough, even though the systems are rated for operation down to 5 F. (Fujitsu's newest RLS2 residential heat pumps - 9,000, 12,000 to 15,000 Btus -

are rated for operation down to -5 F at efficiencies up to 27.2 Seer).

Insert music for "The Good, the Bad and the Ugly"

Joe assures that there've been good, bad and ugly days in an economy that's tested the merit of everyone in the Santa Fe area. When the economy took its epic nosedive a few years ago, Enchantment struggled for work. Unwilling to lay off any of their six employees, Joe and Leroy came up with a variety of work to keep them busy. They pulled money out of the bank on more than one occasion to make payroll. "Everyone has a family to support," he said, "so any work our employees could get, they were extremely grateful for. We had to get pretty creative at times."

Sales are important, but Joe and Leroy are just as attentive to customer service. "That's what leads to referrals," says Joe. "We're always there when a customer needs us."

High adrenalin down time

Once the customers are satisfied and the assignment board is full, Leroy and Joe look for action-oriented down time. After turning a wrench all day, running refrigerant lines or cleaning three-pass boilers, Leroy and Joe are eager to work on their latest project, a motorcycle.

Make no mistake, it's no factory machine. The trike, often referred to as "The Cadillac," is the length of a normal sized car, sports a 454 Chevy engine, 400 turbo tranny, 750 Edelbrock carburetor and a 22-gallon Coors keg gas tank.

With the air cleaner cover and rear lights from a '64 Cadillac and electric seats with built-in heating and cooling, it's got all the comforts of home. ●



Joe greases Taco recirculating pumps at the K-4 campus of Pojoaque Valley Schools.

37