



100 Years in Water Treatment

The past 100 years have been filled with world wars, great technological advancements and inventions and major social movements. WWD Associate Editor Clare Pierson spoke with Alan Davis, president of Hungerford & Terry, about the company's strategies to being successful for 100 years and counting in the water treatment industry.

Pierson: What is a quick timeline of Hungerford & Terry's history, and what are the key facts about its current water treatment technology?

Alan Davis: Hungerford & Terry, incorporated in 1909, has been an employee-owned company going back to 1927 and remains one today. The year 1927 was long before companies were even considering being employee-owned.

In the 1950s and 1960s, H&T's business was handling both process water treatment and drinking water treatment. The drinking water treatment centered on iron and manganese removal using the Hungerford & Terry greensand process. Today, the greensand process still stands as one of our primary areas of expertise. And, when the arsenic MCL was lowered several years ago, our knowledge of iron removal made it a natural way for us to grow, and it was an easy adjustment to make for the removal of arsenic via co-precipitation with iron.

For H&T's industrial process water treatment, it was centered on boiler water makeup using ion exchange. This market has been taken over by reverse osmosis. However, H&T has been able to capitalize on its ion-exchange expertise for the drinking water market. With our counter-current regenerated nitrate exchange systems and our weak acid-softening systems, we have been able to achieve a great deal of success for our customers.

Today, Hungerford & Terry is investigating various ion exchange-based treatment systems. The purpose is to have more cost-effective solutions for our customers to handle other types of drinking water contamination around the world.

Pierson: What do you think the key has been for Hungerford & Terry to remain competitive, keep up with new technology and even thrive for 100 years in this industry?

Davis: Many of our projects are awarded based on public bidding. Therefore, accurate costs cannot be underestimated. In the past 100 years, we have also learned a great deal about the marketplace. It is not just knowing about the importance of costs that keep us in business; most all of our systems are custom-designed. Therefore, to be successful we need to invest in a significant amount of up-front work for potential customers.

Upon receiving a successful bid, our tech, engineering and startup staff—which are second to none—provide the support necessary to satisfy our customer totally. And then, when it is time to expand their system, I believe a satisfied customer has a strong reason to remain a repeat customer.

Pierson: The past 100 years have seen many difficult times, including the Great Depression and other severe financial crises. How will H&T survive the current recession?

Davis: We, like most people, do not have the answer to that today. Simply put, we don't know how long or deep this troubled economy will continue. There has been some talk about pumping funds into infrastructure projects to get the economy going. Of great interest to all of us is how much might be used for water treatment projects. So far, we have not seen a decline in our business, and we are not projecting any decline through the next six months.

Pierson: H&T began its business building water treatment systems and billed itself as water engineers, and then it gradually got into ion exchange. Now it specializes in water filtration and removal of iron and manganese. What has been the rhyme and reason to these changes and do you think it's helped H&T thrive?

Davis: We've gone through necessary changes in our engineering and our product mix. That is in response to market conditions. If we didn't adapt to these changes, H&T wouldn't have survived for 100 years. Our changes have helped us to survive and to grow. It is an important principal of business. Survival is something all of us need to believe in.

Pierson: Where do you see technology heading in the future for iron and manganese removal?

Davis: In the short term—five years or so—I don't see any significant changes in iron and manganese removal technology. For the long term, I think it is reasonable to assume that improvements in membrane performance and lowering of their costs may allow membranes to take a bigger share of the market. **WWD**

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