



AARON PLUMBING AND HEATING CO. By RACHAEL KVAPIL

Contractor goes the distance to provide service to Alaska

Aaron Plumbing and Heating Co. is a well-traveled mechanical contractor. Posters of planes and trains cover the office walls of co-owner and vice president Jim Gibertoni, a licensed pilot who owns his own plane. But what speaks most about the distance to which Aaron Plumbing and Heating has gone for its clients is the Alaska map on Gibertoni's wall. The map, just across from his desk, is covered in push pins identifying every location that Aaron Plumbing and Heating has serviced since opening in 1982. A majority of pins cluster around Interior and South-central Alaska, spreading as far north as Deadhorse, into the panhandle just south of Petersburg and as far west as Shemya, the last island on the Aleutian chain.

"My aviation experience goes hand in hand with my work here," Gibertoni said. "I started flying

because we needed to get plumbers out to rural worksites. Now we go all over the state."

Aaron Plumbing and Heating is a Fairbanks-based company that installs plumbing, heating and air conditioning systems in commercial and industrial buildings; in addition to producing design-build, plan and spec, and time and material projects. About 30 percent of the company's work is design-build, with a majority of their services provided as a subcontractor.

Gibertoni started Aaron Plumbing and Heating with \$26 in small jobs. As the company grew, he brought on two additional co-owners: president/project manager Tom Fisher and secretary/treasurer/project manager Dima Kulmanovsky. Eight employees work in the offices, with an additional 30 to 35 on-site laborers. In recent years, Aaron Plumbing and Heating has worked on projects



Aaron co-owner and vice president Jim Gibertoni stands beside a map on his wall identifying the places where his company has completed projects in Alaska.

PHOTOS: PROVIDED BY AARON PLUMBING AND HEATING



with the Department of Defense, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the State of Alaska, the Fairbanks North Star Borough, the Fairbanks North Star Borough School District, the Yukon Kuskokwim School District, the Lower Yukon School District and the University of Alaska.

Tim Jauhola, superintendent of Innovative Technical Solutions Inc. (ITSI), says that Aaron Plumbing and Heating helped make the remodel of Eielson Air Force Base dormitories 2260 and 2266 effortless.

"Aaron is a good contractor and a pleasure to work with," Jauhola said. "They're organized. They have the tools and materials they need when they need it. They make sure to have qualified people to complete the job."

Due to logistics, the remodel of the two Eielson dormitories spanned two years and included major mechanical and electrical work, installation of fire alarms and the repainting of the interior. ITSI has worked with Aaron on two other projects: the remodeling of the Eielson Nosedock #2 and the U.S. Marine Corps training facility at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson. Jauhola said he would gladly work with Aaron Plumbing and Heating again.

Fisher said the success of Aaron



Aaron Plumbing and Heating Company completed several renovations for the dormitory remodel project and Eielson Air Force Base including piping in the mechanical room.

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The F22 LO Maintenance Facility design-build project at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson was the first facility built to support the F-22 Wing.

Plumbing and Heating comes from not only their quality work but also their emphasis on building strong relationships within the industry. Even though Alaska is a large state, Fisher said the smaller population means contractors, subcontractors and laborers work together frequently. He thinks it is important to be organized and communicate efficiently.

"My job is to make sure the job runs smoothly," he said. "It's not always an easy task. Some people who come up here and bid work do not always

understand the environment we're working against."


Aaron Plumbing and Heating Co. joined Associated General Contractors of Alaska in January of 1993. Fisher said being an AGC member helps him with his organization. For example, just before the interview he had been reviewing AGC literature about industry updates. Without AGC, he said it would take too much time to find all the necessary information independently. Gibertoni sees AGC as an industry advocate in Juneau, protecting

Alaska contractors from unnecessary legislation that will impede their ability to get work done.

Yet, the biggest challenge Fisher and Gibertoni foresee is the economic slowdown. Though Aaron has been busy, it is starting to see fewer projects around the Fairbanks area on which to bid. Gibertoni attributes this, in part, to the general economic turndown that is affecting the rest of the Lower 48; however, he believes political leaders need to take a stronger stance to ensure that things improve sooner than later.

"I'm not a gloom and doom person," Gibertoni said. "But I feel like it's the perfect storm and that the stewards of the money need to realize that we are in a blizzard while they're saving for a rainy day."

For now Gibertoni, Fisher and Aaron's third co-owner, Kulmanovsky, continue to take advantage of their ability to get around the state easily. Fisher said they have increased bidding for work in rural areas to make up for the decrease in projects around Fairbanks. Gibertoni's ability to oversee projects in rural Alaska opens their options more readily than companies that don't have their own aviator.

"Those airplanes have a lot of freedom," Fisher said. "If I had to run a project in Nulato, I couldn't just run out there to look at an issue. I'd fly out, and I wouldn't get back that same day. I'd have to wait for that plane to get back. And in winter, when the weather is unpredictable, you aren't sure when that will happen." 

Rachael Kvapil is a writer and photographer who lives in Fairbanks, Alaska.

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