

Traversing Rough Terrain in Albuquerque

Mike Travers Sr. and his son Mike Jr. have used their combined 45 years of experience to build a rock-solid, service-oriented company.

Gary Holbrook, Mike Neely and Eric Tafoya at the shop, preparing a fan coil for installation at the Solar Villa housing community.

by Dan Vastyan

Mike Travers Sr. got started as a machinist on a U.S. Navy destroyer, and worked nearly 30 years as a technician and district manager for York International Corp. His son, Mike Jr., also had more than 15 years with York. This experience gave the pair the experience they needed when they teamed up to build a rock-solid, service-oriented company.

In April, 2006, the doors to Travers Mechanical Services swung open in Albuquerque, NM. Today, the firm serves commercial and industrial customers across the state, with 24/7 service. With more than 20 technicians — and more to come, because they're hiring — the company stays more than busy, despite a lackluster market and reductions in new construction work.

"Dependability and client satisfaction have been the keys to our success," said Mike Jr., who left York with his father to become co-owner of the company. "Most of our new business comes through referral." Their primary goal as a service provider is to offer customers the highest degree of integrity while continuing to build on their proven capabilities.

Travers only advertises through sponsorships, golf tournaments, and banquets. Beyond those, the lofty customer service standards they've established help maintain and grow the customer base.

Powering-up Under Pressure

On June 26, 2011, a tree that fell onto a power line in the Santa Fe National Forest, started the Las Conchas wildfire — reportedly the largest wildfire in the history of New Mexico. Before the fire was contained on August 3rd, it had consumed over 150,000 acres, some houses, and caused evacuations every time the wind changed direction.

Los Alamos Medical Center was evacuated early and remained vacant for several days. When it came time to bring

the building back on line, Travers Mechanical Services was called. Ultimately, the telephone call they received to send their technicians in, through great clouds of smoke and requiring loads of overtime, set in motion the building of a specialty at the firm: service for critical care facilities.

"Los Alamos called to ask if I could get the job done stat," Mike Jr. says. "They just received word that the town was re-opening and the hospital needed to be in full operation. We worked Saturday, Sunday and Monday of Independence Day weekend assisting the facility engineering staff with the necessary cleaning, servicing and re-commissioning of the HVAC equipment."

According to Travers, the biggest challenges were getting the required air filters and the manpower over a holiday weekend. Thick smoke required every filter to be changed, in three large chillers, six air handlers, 15 roof rooftop units,



Shown in front of the company building are, from left, Mike Youngman, Gary Holbrook, Mike Travers Sr., Mike Neely, Mike Travers Jr., and Eric Tafoya.

Eric Tafoya, service technician and lead installer for the Travers hospital division, looks over a Fujitsu ceiling mount unit after it was installed at the New Mexico Gas Masthead building.



and many exhaust fans.

Although the majority of hospital service calls are received during the week, the business requires 24/7 service. There are a minimum of two technicians on call at any given time, which is one of the reasons that Travers is the contractor of choice for many critical care facilities.

New Mexico Gas Taps Travers

In the summer of 2011, a loyal client called Travers about adding additional cooling to an existing facility. New Mexico Gas Company needed to cool a new server room at their headquarters facility. In addition, a large conference room quickly overheated during crowded meetings. The key problem was that an under-floor plenum system wasn't sized correctly when the building was constructed several years before.

Within a week, two condensing units were installed on the building's roof, and two 42,000 BTU ceiling cassette units were installed in the conference room. The room's drop ceiling made installation a breeze.

"This kind of installation is pretty popular," Mike Jr. says. "Most office buildings here aren't set up for servers. For the small offices that need to keep server equipment cool, this is less expensive, when compared to a full server room ac unit. On this job, they also wanted the option of quickly changing the temperature in the conference room.

"We've installed several different split-system brands, but we've stuck with Fujitsu since 2006 because of their dependability and warranty response," says Mike Jr. "If we run into any problems, our supplier, Johnston Supply, takes good care of us."

Major Chiller Replacement

Several technicians spent the majority of their summer months last year at the Solar Villa Housing Community in Albuquerque. Between April and August of 2011, Travers overhauled the 120-unit complex's entire mechanical system.

"We replaced a 110-ton scroll chiller," says Gary Holbrook,



Service Technician/Lead Hospital Division Installer Eric Tafoya looks over a new McQuay package unit before installation at a local hospital facility.

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senior technician. "It had an evaporator coil leak that contaminated an entire circuit. Given the age of the unit, it was better just to replace it. The new one's an air-cooled McQuay scroll chiller, located on the east side of the building."

The facility had three boilers, two of which were ancient, and one that was relatively new. Each gas-fired boiler was replaced with a new, 750 MBH Mighty Therm II, while the newer, existing boiler remained. According to Neely, each apartment had a fan coil unit, and 11 more were used in common areas. Three things were plaguing the old fan coils; motors going bad, water restriction inside the coils, and airflow restriction through the grilles. All 131 units were replaced with new 37,000-BTUH Lanco H 800 units.

Managing Comfort in Fluctuating Climate

"The challenge our climate poses is most notable in apartment buildings," says Mike Jr. "Most have a two-pipe system: cooling during the summer and heat during the winter. It can be 75F one day and 40F the next, so during the changeover season it can be tricky to choose the right time to switch from heating to cooling, or vice versa."


At Summit Apartments in Albuquerque, the swing season issue was compounded by a 40-year-old boiler with ruptured tubes. Travers would have fixed and retuned the unit, but suggested a replacement. The 193-unit complex has two



Gary Holbrook and Eric Tafoya service a Laars boiler at Summit Apartments.

boilers, one of which Travers recently replaced. With three technicians on the job, they were finished in 24 hours.

According to Travers, the boiler room is small, but the boiler that was replaced was positioned closest to the door, so the project went quickly. When comes time to replace the other boiler, the new, two million BTUH Laars Mighty Therm II units will need to be temporarily disconnected and set aside to allow the next boiler passage into the room.

The Travers team will most likely be the ones to eventually perform future boiler replacements. In their pursuit of the American dream, they've built a solid relationship with facility managers, and are available around the clock. 

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