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Taking a Consultative Approach to Fluid Handling Applications

By Karl J. Paloucek

Arboretum Lakes Chief Engineer Keith Wilburn, Bornquist's Nate Hultgren and Anchor Mechanical's Dan Pufunt examine a Bell & Gossett e-1510 pump, Bell & Gossett Triple Duty Valve and Metraflex flex connectors.

Things are happening at Bornquist. The company was first established in downtown Chicago in 1937 — a group of Bell & Gossett representatives peddling residential pumps out of the backs of their station wagons. In the near century since, it has grown into a company with a sterling reputation as system experts in the HVAC and plumbing industries, specializing in a full array of fluid handling application products. Since the mid-1960s, Bornquist has been working out of its 34,000-sq-ft facility in the Wildwood neighborhood of Chicago, offering sales, service, in-house fabrication, education and efficient solutions to the markets it serves. Now, the company is on the verge of moving to a 60,000-sq-ft building in Northbrook to accommodate its continued expansion.

“We represent about 25 manufacturers within the HVAC and plumbing market,” President David Everhart says, adding that in addition to their Chicago office, they maintain a facility in East Moline. “They cover the western part of the state, down to maybe the central part of the state. Our overall area is the Greater Chicagoland Area, which includes a few counties in Iowa, a few counties along the bottom of the lake in Indiana, and goes down roughly to Springfield. We have approximately 80 employees, now.”

For all of the growth and expansion over the decades, the focus at Bornquist remains the same — hydronic HVAC and plumbing systems. Though Everhart says that they do feature some refrigerant-based lines these days, and they represent roughly two dozen other manufacturers, it's their relationship with Bell & Gossett that remains the core of their business. “The Bell & Gossett pump line and its accessories are the major part of what we do,” he explains. “Bell & Gossett manufactures pumps and accessories that start at the residential level and then go up to the very largest commercial-style pumps. Large commercial-style pumps and accessories are the ones that are predominantly used in data centers, and the cooling is done with water, so we are exposed to that business.”

The proliferation of data centers nationwide is having a massive impact on nearly every facet of construction, and Bornquist is as active as any player in the industry as a result. “We're certainly evolving,” Nate Hultgren, Building Group Sales Manager, offers. “There are large projects out there right now, and it's certainly been driving our business — just because the amount of dollars involved in those projects is just gigantic.”



Building Group Sales Manager Nate Hultgren and President David Everhart visit the new office in Northbrook, Ill., preparing for this year's Vendor Fair.

Everhart agrees. "Bell & Gossett is a big brand for us in the data center market," he says. "Metraflex, another Chicago-based manufacturing company, is a big name in the data center market, and then Wessels, which is one of the tank lines that we represent — Cemline is another one. Those guys manufacture thermal storage tanks, for example, and a lot of these data centers are putting in huge thermal-storage-based facilities for their coolant."

Data centers currently are pivotal to construction right now, as tech companies move to rapidly expand the footprint of A.I. in our world. But what about A.I. in the hydronic HVAC and plumbing markets? What is that looking like, both in the here and now, and on the horizon? According to Hultgren, Bornquist is keeping pace with A.I.'s incursion into the products and services they offer.

"We have the detection group line, which is part of Nexa, which is a Watts product," he says. "They're trying to look now where they can gather data on the complete system with the flow rates and temperatures, and understand through A.I. how the building is using energy, and how to maximize the efficiency. So that is a trend we're starting to see, and B&G is working with some companies as well, to see if they can leverage that as well. We are starting to see, using A.I., to try to improve the efficiency of existing buildings, so I would definitely say that's coming, and I think that's going to be a big focus in the next few years."

The Bornquist Difference

A.I. may be a new information revolution in the making, but for the team at Bornquist, they continue to take a classic "consultative" approach to their business relationships, because they're keenly aware of what their role is with regard to their

potential clients, and they have developed their own way of ensuring that they're offering their best service to each of them. Together, Bornquist employees have more than 500 years of experience in the Industry.

"Having a focus on different customer markets," Hultgren says, with frankness. "The Chief Engineers are very different from the contractors, or the consulting engineers. So the way that you approach and the way that you want to go to market is different, as well. We just try to be aware of that, and try to approach that the best way we can."

"Most sales organizations divide up geographically, and then they have sales people who call on all of the customers in that geographic area," Everhart explains. "But we've found, historically, that your brain eventually runs out of room. It's hard to be an expert in all of those different areas, particularly with all of the product changes. So our idea at the time was to go in with expertise. We created these divisions — we have our Plumbing Division. We have an HVAC Division. We have a Buildings Group. And all of those people have different salespeople to call on the appropriate customer class. So on the building side of things, which Nate heads up, he has a sales team that they're going in to call on the owners — again, on the consultative sales model — to find out what it is that their pain point is, and if we have a way to address it."

"Our [Buildings] Group is client-focused specifically on the building engineers," Hultgren says. "That's our focus, as well as some service contractors."

"We try to do it in a way that doesn't compete with our customers," Everhart clarifies. "That's the part that some people kind of have

trouble understanding, is we're not really here to compete with our stocking distributors, or our service contractors — that's the consultative approach that we take, because the most important thing we're providing is information. When the customer does decide to do something, they come in as smart as possible on that project."

Adapting to the Needs of the Market

Specialized expertise is a major part of the Bornquist equation, but so is reliability, and being there when clients are in acute need. When COVID began to put the squeeze on supply chains for so many industries, and wait times for new pumps started creating real headaches for the contractors and building engineers who needed them posthaste, the team at Bornquist took up action stations and responded to the need by assembling their own pumps — a practice that they continue to maintain.

"We buy pump kits from the manufacturer, and then we can basically trim the impeller, put the motor on and ship that pump out within about two weeks, typically," Hultgren says. "That's not for every model, but for the core models that we see in the field."

"Right. And we would provide startup for that," Everhart adds. "That's one of the reasons for the move to the new building — we've just become so full of inventory that we need more warehouse space."

While Bornquist's service department commits to the task of assembling pumps as needed, they're still available to work on their clients' pumps as needed. If your pump needs a new seal, or a coupler needs changing, they have your back. Bornquist takes a lot of pride in its Service Department's reputation, at times taking care of issues at no charge.

This is a recurring theme with Bornquist — providing complementary service to its clients to keep their operations running as smoothly as possible. "One of the services that we provide to building owners is a mechanical room audit, where we will identify all the pumps, drives, whatever they want us to identify that they have in their building," Everhart says. "And we'll put a spare parts book together for them, if it's product that we represent."

"For all of the Bell & Gossett pumps, we've been doing that quite a bit," Hultgren adds. "It could be 120 pages. We'll have pictures of the nameplate, a picture of the pump, a complete parts list so that they can reference and, say, if something goes wrong with chilled water pump one, I can just pull out my book and say, 'Here's the parts list — here's what I need.' And that's just a resource. It makes it so much easier for them. Or they can call us, and we have [the reference book], too."

"And it's free of charge," Everhart says.

Bornquist at CEAC Vendor Fair 2026

Naturally, Bornquist plans to attend the Chief Engineers Association of Chicagoland's annual Vendor Fair. And they're enthusiastic about what they plan to present to the Chief Engineers in attendance.

"We have the [Xylem] hydrovar® X, which is the new motor-and-drive combo, where the drive is built into the motor — the



Keith Willburn and Nate Hultgren check out a set of Danfoss VFDs.

IE5," Hultgren says. "We'll be showcasing that. That's the newest technology, because we're starting to see that pop up now, and become a little bit more popular. The energy efficiency of the motor is the highest on the market right now."

"IE5 is an electrically commutated motor — it's a totally different construction than having a rotor and a stator, and windings, and all of these other things," Everhart says. "These motors are operating more smoothly than the old-technology Premium Efficient motors are. They have different speed ranges. And the hydrovar X is cool because it's an IE5 motor that has ferrous, all-sustainable construction. We don't have rare-earth magnets in that motor."

Leak detection is also on the Vendor Fair agenda for Bornquist, as they plan to spotlight The Detection Group/Nexa brand and everything that goes into that particular system. "The smart-based station, the hubs, the sensors, the ropes to extend the sensor reach — we'll be talking about that," Hultgren says. "We'll be highlighting our AERCO boilers and our PVI water heaters. And there are some things that they're coming out with — I hope they're out by April, because I'd like to showcase them, but I don't want to say until they're actually official. AERCO has an electric boiler that they recently came out with as well, so we'll have information on that."

Look forward to meeting David Everhart and Nate Hultgren and hearing about everything Bornquist has to offer at the Vendor Fair on Wednesday, April 22, at the Morgan Arts Complex in Chicago. 📍