

Business Heats Up for Conway Services

ANDY MEEK

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Revenue from John Conway's heating and air conditioning company has risen over the years like a thermostat needle on a hot summer day.

Since Conway came to work for his father at Conway Services Heating & Cooling in 1994, the business has relocated and grown from a one-truck operation to a multimillion dollar contracting service. In 1994, the company was a home-based business in Millington that saw \$250,000 in yearly sales. Today, it has 45 employees, 22 vans, a 6,000-square-foot facility in Memphis and more than \$6 million in yearly sales.

Working philosophy. Conway bought the company from his father in 1998, and he attributes his success to his father's business principles.

"It amazes me sometimes when our competition will make a customer mad over \$150 and never, ever see that customer again – that's a lot of future revenue they're just letting go out the door," he said. "I still operate the company by the principles my dad put in place years ago, which are that right is right and wrong is wrong. And a lot of companies struggle with that.

"We understand that nobody gets out of bed in the morning and says they want to spend \$300 or \$400 dollars on their air conditioning. So when we do business with homeowners, we're trying to let them have a pleasant experience with this process."

Specialized service. Conway Services Heating & Cooling, located at 6426 Summer Gale, is a residential HVAC contractor that specializes in new construction work, equipment replacement and maintenance. The company works for about 40 builders in the Memphis market installing air conditioning systems in new homes.

Conway Services provides Carrier, York and Trane lines of equipment, and in the past, the company has been recognized as the largest Carrier and York air conditioning dealers in the Memphis market. In 2002, the Memphis Area Home Builders Association recognized Conway Services for work done for Habitat for Humanity.

Residential customers. Conway said residential work has been the company's bread and butter.

"We feel like the thing we do best is staying in the residential market, where homeowners can have someone they trust to do the work right for them," he said.

Those homeowners include Arlene LoBianco of Millington, who turned to the company recently when her air conditioning system went out.

"And I had company coming for a family reunion," LoBianco said. "The guy came out on a Friday, but he couldn't get it to cool down enough to check it. He showed up on Sunday, which is really unheard of, because he knew we had company coming Monday.

"They just bent over backwards to make sure we had air conditioning, and it's just unheard of from anybody we've dealt with. You just don't find too many companies that will do that."

Company priorities. Training and customer service are Conway's formula for success. That means the company encourages its employees to go the extra mile – as long as they're traveling less than 65 miles per hour. When the company's vans travel faster than that, an alert is triggered and an e-mail sent to Conway.

Each van also is equipped with a global positioning system, or GPS, so technicians can be tracked if customers believe they're waiting too long. And once inside a customer's home, employees wear shoe covers to protect the customer's floors.

Rapid growth. Conway said the company has come far in its 15-year history. It began in his father's Millington home, with a pole barn for a warehouse.

"About 1996, that's when we started experiencing a lot of growth," Conway said. "We branched out into more new construction. In 1997, we moved the business to Bartlett off of Stage Road, but we still kept our warehouse in Millington. We were just kind of testing the water, seeing how that would go, and the business continued to grow dramatically.

"In 1998, we leased a 5,000-square-foot facility off Whitten Road, around the corner from our present site. We were there for five years, and in January 2004 we bought this building. In that time, there's just been constant growth throughout each of our different departments."

Careful hiring. Conway Services is a member of Nexstar, a group of 300 heating and air conditioning and plumbing companies nationwide that have formed a best practices group. The company sends employees and technicians to regular training meetings, mostly for customer service skills.

"We're trying to improve the quality of our industry, and we also take pride in hiring the right technicians, so we're very particular about who we hire," Conway said. "Sometimes, we can have 30 to 40 applicants for one position. But we're only looking for the best in the industry."

Core principles. In 2006, Conway Services wants to add a plumbing service component. But no matter how much the operation grows or revenue climbs, Conway said his father's core principles will remain at the heart of the company.

"Because we hire the best in the industry, sometimes that costs us a little more money, and sometimes it costs the homeowner a little more money for us to deliver that service," he said. "But at the same time, they don't have to worry about that service being delivered correctly.

"One of the principles that's helped us to grow is just the principle of doing what we say we're going to do."

Conway Services Heating & Cooling

Owner: John Conway

Founded: 1990

Basics: The second-generation, family-owned heating and air conditioning contractor moved into an expanded facility in Memphis last year to accommodate growth. 384-3511