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Supply New England: A True Distributor

FOCUS ON BRANDS

Jason and James Reardon, owners of Supply New England, which celebrated its 60th year in business last year, in the live-fire area of the distributor's highly-regarded training facility.

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What is a distributor, anyway? No doubt, it means running a business with more than a few products stocked at precisely the correct inventory levels to support a network of locations separated by miles, but ready to go at a moment's notice into the back of a contractor's truck.

That typically means a warehouse filled to the brim with product.

But what about all that product, itself? Is it the best of the best?

Getting 'smaller' to grow bigger

IN A QUEST TO GROW their wholesale operations, brothers Jason and James Reardon, owners of Supply New England, which operates 18 branches in Massachusetts, Rhode Island and Connecticut along with seven retail kitchen and bath showrooms and two Kohler Signature Stores from the company headquarters in Attleboro, Mass., decided to get bigger by way of getting "smaller." Or, more appropriately, by taking a decidedly narrow and more focused approach to the brands they distribute.

Products from "premier vendors" is how the wholesaler puts it on the company's website.

"We're a true distributor," Jason explained.

"We get 100 percent behind the products we choose and grow

from there. We're focused on building a partnership both with our vendors and our customers."

In some cases, that really does mean just one line. For bathroom fixtures, it's Kohler. Back-flow preventers, Watts. And for power generators, Honeywell. For many other plumbing and heating lines, contractors can generally count on one hand the choices stocked by Supply New England.

'Not purchasing agents'

"Another way to think about it is that we are not purchasing agents for our customers," James added. "We don't want to just stand there and take orders. If we've decided to get behind a product, we think it's the best one."

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And if we think it's the best one, then we have to learn all there is about the product so that we can articulate why it's the best to our customers."

The brothers first started putting this philosophy into place in the 2000s when they began the process of leading the business that their father, John, built over the years with the Reardon Cos., along with a strategic merger with David Corcoran and his R.B. Corcoran Supply. (The company marked its 70th anniversary last year; for more on the distributor's long history, be sure to read our related sidebar.)

"The Wholesaler" stopped by Supply New England to see how they get behind one product, in particular, Navien, for its condensing boilers and tankless water heaters."

Supply New England began distributing the line in 2010, just a few years after the Korean manufacturer established its American

operations, and the supply house has since become one of the vendor's VIP Wholesalers.

"Certainly, we're in a traditional type of heating market," James said. "That means almost every

How one distributor decided to get 'bigger' by concentrating on the lines it thinks are the best.

boiler is cast iron and sits on the floor along with the traditional tank-type water heater."

The distributor gladly markets those products, too, but also recognized "a clear movement" as Jason puts it, to wall-hung condensing boilers and tankless water heaters.

High efficiency was a definite driving force behind the trend. Take a look at the company's tankless units. All Navien tankless products feature Energy Factors above 0.96, in this case, achieving greater energy ef-

ficiency than any other gas tankless water heaters on the market. Meanwhile, Energy Star requirements that went into effect last April require all tankless water heaters to have a minimum EF of

0.90; Navien's NPE-S provide an industry-leading 0.99 EF. (No surprise then to learn that the "PE" stands for "Premium Efficiency.")

Still, condensing boilers and tankless water heaters remain relatively new to plenty of contractors.

"Tiny boilers, smaller heat exchangers and a lot of critical parts," Jason explained. "We had to be very specific about how it was piped, what circulators were connected to it, what water it was trying heat and for what application. We had to answer a lot of questions to make sure that such installations go seamlessly for our customers."

A strong partnership

We met Tim O'Brien, a sales rep for David Gooding Inc., a manufacturers rep based in Brockton, Mass., prior to our meeting with Jason and James.

"Supply New England has really taken the Navien line to the next level," O'Brien said, who grew up a couple of miles from the Reardon's main location at the time and remembered the common refrain of "Get it at Reardon's," for any plumbing and heating supply one would need.

David Gooding Inc., itself, has been instru-

mental in promoting the Navien line within its trading area, which covers the New England states along with New York and the Mid-Atlantic states.

The strong partnership between the sales rep and distributor cannot be underestimated in creating the success of a product line. The sales rep plays an important role and works very closely with their distributors to ensure that product features and benefits are thoroughly understood. They, too, make frequent job site visits when there is uncertainty on the part of the installer.

O'Brien is just one of the Gooding team who works closely with Supply New England to make

"If a contractor is putting in a Navien product for the first time we'll come out with them and basically be their helper for the day."

sure all of the nuances and new product innovations of the Navien product line are clearly understood and ready to be taught.

Training

When asked what sets the wholesaler apart from its competitors, O'Brien didn't hesitate with the answer.

"It's the company's in-house training," he added. "Nobody knows more about the Navien line than Nancy does." So much so he says that it's not that big of a secret that even other wholesalers that market Navien equipment tell their customers to head to one of Nancy's classes. Or if there's a problem, just call Nancy, and she'll talk you through it.

"Nancy" would be Nancy Imhoof, HVAC sales manager, who

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The Supply New England management team. "We get 100 percent behind the products we choose and grow from there," said Jason Reardon, who along with his brother, James, owns the wholesaler.

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has been a key to educating the trades about all the company's products since she joined Supply New England in 2009 after working for a large local plumbing contractor.

"We go over everything a

contractor will need to make a proper choice – since there is no one piece of equipment that is right for every application," Imhoof explained. "But after the choice is understood, we go through everything to ensure a



proper installation."

Depending on the class, installers also get the chance to break down and rebuild boilers or water heaters because "when you open up a piece of equipment that is something other than a traditional combustion boiler or tank-type water heater," Imhoof said, "it can be intimidating. So we take that fear away."

A quick look at Imhoof's upcoming training schedule shows a

variety of general classes on generic topics such as "Duct Sizing," "A/C Startup," and "Boiler Piping." However, there are several full-day classes solely on Navien.

"The Navien line is a new spin on heating equipment," Jason added. "So when the line was new, we quickly realized that we needed to educate the contractors. That's really where Nancy came in. But we actually hired a whole department to bring this message to the



The company's in-house training program is key to helping installers understand the products Supply New England distributes.

70 years of Supply New England history

The company we know today as Supply New England was created in 2000 with merger of The Reardon Cos., Inc. and R.B. Corcoran Co., which established the largest plumbing and heating company in Southeastern Massachusetts and Rhode Island.

Both companies got their original starts in the 1940s as offshoots of Corcoran Supply Co, Brockton, Mass.

"Almost every distributor in this area can trace their lineage to Corcoran Supply," said Jason L. Reardon, who along with his brother James are the owners of Supply New England, which currently employs 150 people and runs its network of branches and kitchen and bath showrooms from its Attleboro, Mass., headquarters. "Even our grandfather worked for another offshoot of Corcoran Supply."

The Reardon Companies, Inc.

In 1945, two employees of Corcoran Supply of Brockton, Massachusetts formed a relationship. Together, Walter Reardon and Howard Lynch purchased A.J. Laliberte Supply Co. in Attleboro. The two new owners continued the business under the same name until 1946.

In 1946, at the close of WWII, Walter Reardon and Howard Lynch founded the Reardon & Lynch Co. in Attleboro. By 1955, the company had become a major player in the Attleboro-Brockton trading locale.

In 1966, Lynch retired, selling his interest in the company to Walter's son, John.

In 1978, John acquired The Allen & Reed Co., an established Providence, R.I., supplier of industrial PVF.

In 1982, the acquisition of Thornley Supply Co. expanded the company's territory to include Pawtucket and Peacedale, R.I.

In 1992, John purchased the plumbing and heating inventory and warehouse of J.T. O'Connell Co., a building materials supplier in Rhode Island's Newport area.

In 1994, John's sons, Jason and James, assisted in negotiating the purchase of Corcoran Supply of Fall River, Mass. The Reardon

by 1981.

During 1983 and 1984, R.B. Corcoran opened branches on the islands of Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket – the first supply houses to locate off the mainland.

In 1993, R.B. Corcoran Co. created the Kitchen and Bath Gallery division run by Carolyn Corcoran. Kitchen displays were eventually added to the showrooms in several other locations before the merger with The Reardon Companies in 2000.

David Corcoran, Robert's son and co-owner of the family business, successfully ran R.B. Corcoran's daily operations as general manager when he joined the business 1973.

"It was like a meeting of the minds between our father and David," James said. "They both understood the importance of covering a larger market share and competing against retail home centers as well as other wholesalers."

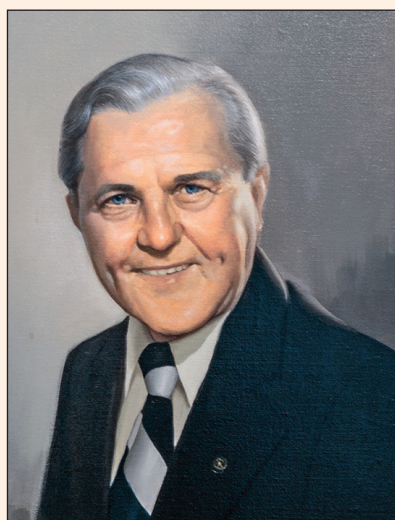
In 2000, Supply New England bought United Supply of Rhode Island and has currently grown to one

of the top five plumbing and HVAC distributors in New England.

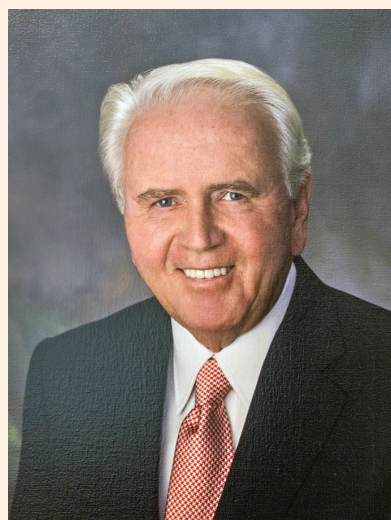
The wholesaler has also made a big push into the decorative bath and kitchen market. In 2013, Kohler opened its first Signature Store in the Boston area, and owned and operated by Supply New England. It opened a second Signature Store in Burlington, Mass., just last December.

John and David have since retired, leaving Jason and James in charge.

"Our father and David were the architects of Supply New England," Jason added, "But we were the footmen who did the day-to-day work." 🌐



Walter Reardon (left) helped get the wholesaler started in 1945. Later, John Reardon (right) along with David Corcoran, R.B. Corcoran Co., merged their companies together to form Supply New England.



Companies' final acquisition prior to merging with R.B. Corcoran Co. was that of Dalton & Ingersoll Co., the oldest plumbing and heating supply house in the country. With the addition of this company's two sites, Reardon Cos. further increased its market presence across Massachusetts and Rhode Island.

R.B. Corcoran Co., Inc.

The R.B. Corcoran Co. was incorporated in 1947 by Robert Corcoran, also as an offshoot of Corcoran Supply.

R.B. Corcoran had the distinction of being the first plumbing and heating supply house on Cape Cod and opened several more branches

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contractor, and walk him through each installation until they become comfortable and they're able to do it on their own."

In other words, the wholesaler does about everything it can short of installing the equipment.

"We're teachers on how to do the installation," Jason said. "That's

Condensing boilers and tankless water heaters remain relatively new to plenty of contractors. "Tiny boilers, smaller heat exchangers and a lot of critical parts."

how we get behind Navien. We saw that this is a little different than the traditional heating equipment. If we didn't explain these things, it would never take off."

Live-fire center

Imhoof got a big boost in educating contractors last year when Supply New England opened up

its live-fire training center at the company's headquarters. The live-fire training center outfitted with the distributor's heating lines does the job of not only replicating the real-life experience making a service call, but also actually provides power to the building.

"There are some places that have heating equipment that are just models," James added. "With this training space we actually have the ability to truly show the contractor the performance of the heating capacity of whatever we want to run."

The live-fire equipment room, which sits behind the classroom, includes seven boilers, an on-demand water heater and a variable-speed furnace with a modulating heat pump.

While education may be Imhoof's forte, she also heads up the department Jason spoke of, which includes a design tech to handle the chore of helping the contractors put together a complete packaged system. The team also includes a radiant expert and additional personnel to offer technical

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Tim O'Brien, sales rep for David Gooding Inc., based in Brockton, Mass., is just one of the Gooding team who works closely with Supply New England to make sure all of the nuances and new product innovations of the Navien product line are clearly understood and ready to be taught.

support over the phone as well as in the field. They support an equal amount of both commercial and residential projects.

"If a contractor is putting in a Navien product for the first time," Imhoof added, "we'll come out with them and basically be their helper for the day."

Keep in mind, Imhoof is also responsible for training that takes place in all the company's branches. However, the star of the show certainly sounds like it's the year-old live-fire training room for which contractors from as far away as Nantucket fly in to attend.

Overall support


In selecting its product lines, Supply New England ultimately builds onto the business plan of its key vendors.

In a roundabout way, Jason places Navien, a company relatively young in the United States,

alongside its well-known plumbing line, Kohler.

"The philosophical reasoning and strategy behind Kohler and Navien are mirror images," Jason said. "Both companies have a finely crystallized vision of where they want to take their companies. We can see it, too. We're charging in the same direction."

Jason went on to explain that it stands to reason that anyone who wants a fashionable bathroom also wants to provide endless hot water to that bathroom in the best way possible, too.

"If you look at the demographics of our residential market, we're really more into the mid- to upper-range products. Most of our residential market isn't repairing a 20-year-old toilet; they're gutting the bathroom or doubling the size of the room and putting in awesome bathrooms and kitchens and awesome heating systems." 



Nancy Imhoof, HVAC sales manager, is key to educating the trades about all Supply New England's products. Here she inspects a training manual in the live-fire equipment room behind the classroom, which includes seven boilers, an on-demand water heater and a variable-speed furnace with a modulating heat pump.