

## Celebrating Heroes

**Keeping customers front and center, American Refrigeration Supplies commemorates its 80-year history while writing the next chapter of its story.**

BY PAMELA ACCETTA SMITH

Everyone needs a hero. But heroes aren't always the most powerful people in the world or the people who save the world from all evil. For Phoenix-based American Refrigeration Supplies Inc. (ARS), there are no specific traits someone has to have to make him or her a hero; they just have to be a part of your story.

More specifically, ARS' story.

As the privately owned, regional wholesale distributor of HVACR parts, equipment and supplies celebrates 80 years in business, ARS is committed to writing the next chapter of its story — with the customer at the center.

"The focus of our story is making our customers heroes," says John White, president of ARS. "And as we celebrate this milestone, we are committed to listening more attentively and responding more effectively to the ever-changing needs of our customers. We can only do that by knowing the problems they are facing, what they need to overcome those problems and offering solutions to help them."

The company's mission is to help customers succeed in their business

by supplying knowledge, customer service and quality products. "It's how we execute our mission every day — by helping them succeed," he adds.

### Phoenix Rising

In business since 1940, ARS began with a single location at 231 South Central in Phoenix. In the early stages of the company's growth, ARS expanded throughout the state of Arizona. "We opened a Tucson store through acquisition in 1948, and then a Yuma location in 1956," White notes. "In 1976, we expanded outside of Arizona by first incorporating in Virginia but then acquiring Texas and New Mexico companies in 1979."

**"OUR ABILITY TO PROVIDE EXCEPTIONAL CUSTOMER SERVICE COMES FROM OUR EFFORTS TO LIVE OUT THESE VALUES EVERY DAY, AS WE FULFILL OUR MISSION."**

— JOHN WHITE, ARS PRESIDENT



Additional acquisitions and new store openings followed throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Today, with annual sales in excess of \$100 million and more than 200 full-time employees, ARS now has 32 branch locations across Arizona, California, Nevada, New Mexico, Texas, and Virginia.

In 1996, the wholesale distributor moved into its current Phoenix headquarters at 2632 East Chambers. "We changed the company name to American Refrigeration Supplies Inc. in 2000 to better reflect our broad regional presence and customer-focused strengths across all the geographies we serve," White explains.

In 1970, another long-time Arizona company, the Kitchell Corp., and a gentleman named Al Owens (who relocated to Arizona as part of the acquisition) bought ARS and its (then) three locations.

Owens became president and eventually sold his ownership to Kitchell in 1992, retiring several

years later. Stephen Martin, who began his career with ARS in 1978, was ultimately named president of the company in 1992. He served in that role until 2018, when ARS welcomed the fifth president in the company's history, John White.

"While we have grown organically and through acquisition, our growth has always centered on expanding our service and capabilities in a manner consistent with our core values," White says. "This type of core value alignment is a cornerstone requirement of any acquisition we have done in the past, or may consider in the future."

While the company's start was in refrigeration 80 years ago, ARS now carries a complete offering of HVAC and refrigeration equipment, parts and supplies to help its diverse customer base.

"We are proud of our diversity, able to support both HVAC and refrigeration customers of all sizes," he adds. "Our business mix reflects that diversity."

### A Different Kind of Advantage

What sets the ARS team from others in the industry, White says, is the company's talented and dedicated workforce who all

## THE PEOPLE OF ARS

Wholesale distributor American Refrigeration Supplies strives to create a culture where its people promote the company's values of honesty, integrity, quality, loyalty and respect.



White

**PRESIDENT JOHN WHITE.** The fifth president in the company's history, White joined ARS in 2018. A native of Arizona, White graduated from the University of Arizona, and then obtained his Juris Doctor degree, cum laude, from Arizona State University College of Law. After many years of practicing business and civil rights law as an attorney, White entered the corporate world as a business executive. He has previous experience in import/export and warehouse logistics, as well as international supply chain management.



Sinkler

**SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT JACK SINKLER.** A native of Chicago, Sinkler joined ARS in May 2015. He graduated from Arizona State University and then entered the HVAC industry in sales and branch management roles before continuing his graduate studies at DePaul University and Loyola University Chicago. Sinkler has held executive-level positions with several industry manufacturing and distribution companies.

The remainder of the headquarters management team is as follows:

- Ross Musil, vice president of administration
- Ken Welch, director of sales and support
- Michael Leo, director of finance and accounting
- Wendy Jindra, director of information systems
- Tim Gilligan, senior business director (Southwest)
- Joe Coniglio, director of inventory control and purchasing
- Robert Yeamans, HVAC product manager
- Brad Brown, corporate credit manager
- Lisa Carrier, payroll and business services manager
- Lisa Olvera, human resource and safety manager
- Lorna Fletcher, accounting manager
- Jennifer Cushman, marketing communications manager
- Gene Scheid, distribution center manager
- Tom Reagan, facility services manager

The division management team:

- Rob Edens, regional manager (Southwest): Arizona, Texas, New Mexico and Las Vegas
- Rich McIntosh, regional manager (West): California
- Mickey Boyer, regional manager (East): Virginia
- The branch teams: The most important people in the organization, Sinkler says, are those who directly serve ARS customers in the company's branch locations throughout the country, bringing value every day.



The company's original 1940s showroom.  
All photos: American Refrigeration Supplies Inc.

value the critical concept of being on a team.

"Our team brings many different views that focus on a unified set of core values," he notes. "We truly have good people at ARS — some who have been here more than 30 years — who appreciate and value our long-time customers. We have good people who take care of good people, and that makes a difference."

There's a value proposition behind the quality of what you get from ARS, White says. "It includes the people, the products and customer service," he explains. "We treat everyone with dignity, quality, care and integrity. We always try to do the right thing. That may sound cliché, but we are committed to doing what's right, even when it comes at a cost."

Integrity is at the core of the company, adds Jack Sinkler, senior vice president of ARS.

"We do what we say we're going to do when we say we're going to do it, we honor our commitments, and if something goes wrong, we own up to it and try to make it right," he notes. "We're not perfect, but we're trying to be. It's a moving target, perfection. You'll never get there, but we certainly want to achieve it the closest we can. So we set the bar pretty high for our employees in terms of what types of customer satisfaction levels we want to reach."

### The Next 80 Years ... and Beyond

Looking toward the future, White says the distributor will continue in earnest to explore upgrading some of the company's critical systems, as well as building out a first-class e-commerce and mobile computing strategy.

"We are pursuing technological improvement strategies that will help ARS be seen as an industry leader in how we use technology to drive our business," he notes. "We are working on adopting new enterprise resource planning software that will allow us to improve our efficiency at the counter, allow for better mobile ordering and online shopping experiences down the road, and work better with the custom mobile app we launched last year."

The company also has plans to refresh its product lines with new introductions. "Additionally, we are introducing numerous new strategies and campaigns to reignite our HVAC equipment business and refrigeration base in California and Virginia," White says.

He adds that the company is committed more than ever to better understanding the needs of its customers.

"We are dedicated to understanding what challenges our customers are facing so we can work harder to help them

### ARS SERVES THE COMMUNITY WITH 'FOUNDER'S DAY'

American Refrigeration Supplies' parent company, Kitchell Corp., started Founder's Day to honor the legacy of Kitchell's founder, Sam Kitchell, who passed away in September 2006. ARS celebrates him each year by serving the community in different ways for an entire week.

"We celebrate Founder's Day to remember his legacy, which, of course, includes his decision to join with Al Owens to buy ARS," ARS President John White says. "Sam, like Al, was focused on making a difference in the community. During Founder's Day, we take a week to intentionally invest time in our community, together, as an organization."

Last year during this time, ARS took great strides in its effort to invest in the communities in which they serve.

"We donated blood, helping more than 50 people, and packed 10,298 meals, enough to feed 28 kids for an entire year," White says. "Our Tucson-area branches supported the United Cerebral

Palsy of Southern Arizona by hosting eight interns in their Workability program. We also made a financial donation to IMission, an organization helping fight poverty in Mexico by building houses for families who earn the opportunity through their own community involvement."

This year, White says, ARS wants to broaden the impact of these efforts with wider-reaching, more widespread participation.



The ARS team participated in helping the local Phoenix community provide nutrition and food to the valley's less fortunate during the company's week-long Founder's Day celebration.



Also during the company's week-long Founder's Day celebration, ARS donated blood, helping more than 50 people.



American Refrigeration Supplies' home headquarters in Phoenix.



Trade school students with vendors at the ARS Expo. Trade school students interact with 'real-world' industry professionals while learning more about how featured products work.



## A COMPANY INVESTMENT

American Refrigeration Supplies established the ARS Expo and ARS Assembly to further reflect its commitment to investing in its people, customers, suppliers and vendors.

The ARS Expo is a major regional event for customers, suppliers and trade school students who are just entering the industry.

"This includes suppliers showcasing their products in a traditional trade show manner, NATE-certified training events for customers, special welcoming messages to trade school students, and food — breakfast and lunch," ARS President John White says. "We have been told by dozens of suppliers that it is the best supplier/customer show they've ever attended."

The ARS Assembly is an annual internal employee gathering at the company's home office in Phoenix. It was established for internal employee meetings and training and includes the ARS management team, and a rotation of other field employees.



As part of internal employee training for 2020, ARS invited a panel of customers to the ARS Assembly to provide feedback to employees on various company initiatives.

in today's environment," White notes. "Our initiatives will focus on collecting a 360-degree view of who we are today, so we can better help our customers tomorrow. This includes analyzing customer feedback and engaging them on a partner level in continuous improvement strategies."

By keeping customers the heroes of the ARS story, Sinkler says the company will find ways to navigate the next 80 years by using its first 80 years as a great platform.

"In keeping with our core values, we will continue to invest in people — our employees, customers, suppliers and community — while at the same time elevating our brand," White adds. "We want to translate our company statement of making our customers the heroes into action items. We want everything we do to ultimately impact our customers in a successful way."

### In Trying Times

The COVID-19 pandemic has undoubtedly brought with it disruption to life and business, White says.

"But disruption also brings with it an opportunity to innovate," he adds. "We see it with big companies converting their plants to manufacture needed supplies and equipment."

"Each of us, too, has an opportunity to innovate. Whether it's a

change in what we communicate with our customers or each other, or in the hours and locations we work, we are committed to finding something new we can do each day to help make a customer feel like a hero."

**"OUR ARS LEADERSHIP TEAM AND OUR EMPLOYEES ARE WHAT MAKE US A GREAT COMPANY, AND WHAT FUELS OUR CONTINUED SUCCESS, AND THAT OF OUR CUSTOMERS."**

— JACK SINKLER, ARS SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT

It may be as easy, White says, as asking how a customer is doing, or finding out if there's anything they need. "It may be sharing with them a link to online training, or information they can watch to improve their knowledge if their business is slow," he explains. "Whatever it is, we want to use this temporary gift of time and space to find new ways, every day, to be more connected to our customers."

In some jurisdictions where communities are on full lockdown, ARS has adopted different protocols and ways of doing business, depending on customer demand. "And we are managing the fear by managing to the facts," White says. "We are following all the recommendations on what we're supposed to be doing, and when we're supposed to be doing it, to put our people in the best position

to be safe and productive."

During these unprecedented times, ARS continues to push forward with many of its plans for the year. This includes the relocation of the Anaheim branch. The landlord is currently completing building improvements and ARS hopes to take occupancy very soon.

"This will be a key piece for Southern California to use to launch our new initiatives," White says. "Our main goal is finding a way to keep everybody safe. After that, our focus is on keeping everybody employed and productive, including our customers."

The HVAC industry is considered essential during these trying times. ARS takes pride in that fact and takes the responsibility very seriously. "We believe as an industry that what we do matters, and it matters to our country, especially during this national crisis," he states. "It's part of the reason we want to stay safe, but productive."

Sinkler agrees while looking at these uncharted waters through a positive, forward-thinking lens: "We know we're going to get through this. And we'll end up stronger than we've ever been before, because it's what solid, great companies do. And when you look at the opportunity we have from a positive point of view, we've been told what we do is important. It is an optimistic reminder to our employees that we are in an industry that is not going away. So we continue on. It is an honor to help support our customers through these trying times." 🍷



The ARS Team at the Expo 2019 inaugural event in Phoenix.

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