

Moving Water Keeps Briggs Pumped

For more than a century, one could say Briggs Inc. of Omaha has moved from 'the great outdoors' to 'making indoors great' while essentially doing the same thing – getting water from one point to another.

Briggs Pump Company – a wholesale distributor of plumbing, HVAC, pump and well supplies, was founded by William S. Briggs in 1906, with its first location at 11th and Farnam.

showrooms. They carry mostly intermediate and higher-end fixtures, including bath tubs, whirlpools, electronic showers and toilets, cast-iron sinks and decorator faucets. With time, pumps have come to represent only about 15 percent of their business.

"We still sell windmill parts and accessories, mostly in the panhandle and Sandhills (of Nebraska) where there's just not a lot of electricity," says Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer, Randy Beets, "and we've changed our business model to more efficient solar pumps replacing the old style windmill pumps."

"We also serve the agricultural market through pumps, equipment for wells and irrigation equipment," added Chief Financial Officer, Chris Sunde. "With a moratorium on new wells in Nebraska, it's mostly replacement-type work. We do considerable business with plumbing contractors and home builders," Sunde said.

Today, if you go into one of Briggs' seven warehouses – or even better, one of its two stand-alone showrooms – you'll see their new way of moving water. Luxurious china, cast iron, fiberglass and stainless-steel kitchen and bath products are now much of what you find moving in and out the doors of Briggs' locations.



Above: Briggs' Showroom at 138th & Industrial Road.

Below: Early Briggs' catalog featuring windmill model sold by the company.

The company's current headquarters at 14549 Grover Street is near Omaha's Kitchens & Baths by Briggs' Showroom at 138th & Industrial Road; a second Kitchens & Baths store is in Lenexa, Kansas. The company has two locations in Omaha as well as Lincoln, Grand Island and North Platte in Nebraska, and Carroll and Sioux City in Iowa.

"The expansion beyond Omaha was in large part made possible with First National Bank," said Sunde. "We've been a First National customer for 42 years and consider them our financial business partner, particularly for our line of credit," he said.

"We've had a tremendous relationship with them," Beets added. "They've been there to support our growth and needs. When we were expanding back in the 1970s and 1980s, First National Bank helped us with financing."

"We've grown with the peaks and valleys of the overall home market, but diversity in our locations and markets helped smooth it all out," Sunde said, "and if folks aren't building new, they're remodeling."

The diversification into residential and commercial markets has also proved profitable, although it sometimes has its scary moments. "We saw the housing market drop 70 percent virtually overnight," Beets said, "but then agriculture picked up at about the same time and now construction looks like it's improving. The future looks very good."



Chris Sunde (left) and Randy Beets in Briggs' southwest Omaha warehouse.

Briggs Pump Company is now Briggs Inc. of Omaha, a premier Kohler distributor with seven warehouses and



Decorative plumbing products at one of Briggs' two stand-alone showrooms.

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