

A PUBLICATION FOR FLORIDA PLUMBING-HVAC-MECHANICAL AND RELATED INDUSTRIES

# Florida Plumbing Perspective™

JANUARY-FEBRUARY 2009



## Cloudy days ahead for 'Sunshine State' economy

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# Vickery & Company

## Engineering solutions for the 21st Century

*Jason Proctor, president,  
and Dennis Barber, CEO.*



**When the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA),** needed a high-performance water booster system for its new Ares rocket launch pad at Cape Canaveral, Vickery & Company got the project. After all, the Tampa-based manufacturer's rep firm is a statewide leader in supplying commercial pumping, fire protection, and HVAC systems.

"The NASA system is a very exciting, high-profile project for our team," says Dennis Barber, chief executive officer. "And it's just one of the many complex installations we're doing throughout Central Florida."

In the plumbing sector, Vickery & Company focuses on engineered solutions in domestic water booster systems and water heating and storage, and recently adding a drafting and design department.

Another key move in the past year: greatly expanding the firm's service business to provide an additional value to customers. "We are one of the few Florida rep firms with in-house service trucks that maintain the equipment we sell," notes Barber. "We service other commercial lines as well, and have seen that overall side of our business grow by 200 percent in 2008."

Now, Vickery & Company is helping NASA as it moves ahead with plans to replace the aging fleet of space shuttles with the next generation of Ares crew launch vehicles. The space agency is installing a decontamination chamber 60 feet in the air above the launch pad, and Vickery & Company worked closely with the engineering team every step of the way.

"If there is an issue with the astronauts relating to fuel leakage or other problem, the decontamination chamber will be right there for them," says Barber. "It has to be strong enough to resist an explosion, and everything in the chamber has a backup system, so it's 100 percent redundant. It's the kind of challenge we like to tackle."

### DECADES OF SERVICE

Vickery & Company can trace its history to 1945 when two business partners, B.A. Thomas and Bill Johnston, launched Thomas & Johnston. After nearly four decades of serving the Tampa Bay area, ownership in the company passed to two of their sons-in-law in 1984 and became Vickery-Clarke. In the late 1980s, Bill Clarke retired and the company became Vickery & Company.

Barber, a son-in-law of Bill Clarke, joined the company in 1983, and took over sole ownership on Jan. 1, 2005. Now, Vickery & Company is in its third generation of the family ownership with a fourth generation as well, in the person of Service Manager Nate Barber.

"As a locally owned and managed firm, we can respond quickly to changes in the Florida market," says Jason Proctor, president, a 10-year industry veteran who joined Vickery & Company in 2002. "That's been an important contributor to our success over the years."

Another company veteran is Rick Wright, senior project engineer, who has more than 38 years industry experience as a designer, contractor, and manufacturer's representative.

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# THE WAVE OF THE FUTURE



Commercial  
Copper Boilers  
  
Domestic  
Water Heaters  
& Pool Heaters  
  
Storage Tanks



Domestic Boosters:  
Fire, HVAC and Custom  
Packaged Pumping Systems  
  
U.L. & E.T.L. Listed



*Representatives for all of your Plumbing,  
Fire Protection and HVAC needs*



#### **Aurora Pump Company**

- Pumps: HVAC, Fire, Plumbing
- Full Line of Hydronic Accessories
- Suction Diffusers & Triple-Duty Valves
- Air Separators & Expansion Tanks

#### **V&C Domestic Boosters**

- U.L.-Listed Domestic Booster System

#### **Thrush Company, Inc.**

- Air Separators & Expansion Tanks
- Pump Accessories
- Heat Transfer Packages
- Shell and Tube Heat Exchangers
- Circulators, Inline Pumps

#### **Tranter Plate & Frame Heat Exchangers**

- Heat Exchangers
- Compact Brazed Heat Exchangers
- Gasketed Plate and Frame Heat Exchangers

#### **Wendland Manufacturing Corp.**

- Domestic Storage Tanks
- Hot Water Storage Tanks

#### **Wessels Company**

- Expansion Tanks, Air Separators
- Air / Dirt Separators

#### **Weil Pump Company**

- Vertical Enclosed Shaft, Submersible Dry Pit  
Sewage Pumps and Sumps Pumps

#### **Winters Instrumentation**

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- Gauges: Process, Contractor, Differential,  
Ammonia, Liquid Filled, Low Pressure
- Pressure Snubbers, Needle Valves
- Diaphragm Seals, Electronics, Pressure  
Switches

#### **Exhausto**

- Venting Design Solutions
- Fan-Assisted Draft Reducers

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Solid Separators
- Glycol Feed Systems
- Chemical and Filter Feeders

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- PS / IPS Stack
- Energy Vent Type 'B' Gas Vent
- DF Dual Fuel Piping
- Zero-Clearance Grease Duct

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Other key personnel include Marian Key, aftermarket sales, and Lindsay Barber, accounting.

In 2007 the company bought a new 6,000-square-foot building and renovated it. It now includes a multimedia conference room for in-house lunch-and-learn sessions with engineers. The company also provides in-house contractor training and hosts factory visits with customers.

Vickery & Company has focused on serving Central Florida, including Tampa, Ocala, Orlando, Daytona Beach, Sarasota, Fort Myers, and Naples. However, the firm recently expanded to serve customers in Jacksonville and Miami-Fort Lauderdale. Sergio Martinez, CSP, sales engineer, joined Vickery & Company to handle the I-95 corridor in eastern Florida. He is a certified sales professional fluent in Spanish as well as English.

Statewide, Proctor noted that about 50 percent of the firm's business is plumbing, with the balance split between fire protection and HVAC. Vickery & Company's major product lines include:

- SyncroFlo Pumping Packages
- RBI Water Heaters & Storage Tanks
- Aurora Pump Company
- Thrush Company
- Weil Pump Company

Barber notes that SyncroFlo is a new addition that significantly enhances the firm's capabilities. The Atlanta-based manufacturer is the largest independent fabricator of domestic water booster and clear water pump systems from 50 to 50,000 gpm, with capabilities up to 500 psi. Its products are used to optimize total pump system performance, protect customer pumping investments, and protect the environment through water and energy conservation.

"SyncroFlo has over 25,000 plumbing, fire protection, and HVAC package systems worldwide," says Barber. "Since pioneering the booster industry, SyncroFlo has maintained a high level of quality and integrity, consistently over-delivering to its clients."



**Vickery & Company personnel stand alongside the 1950 Chevy truck that the company restored in an employee team effort. The photo shows the company's Tampa building.**

## ENGINEERED FOR TODAY — AND TOMORROW

Vickery & Company has built strong relationships with Florida's engineering community over the years. In fact, Barber was a charter member of ASPE's Florida West Coast Chapter in the early 1990s and continues to play an active role. Meanwhile, Proctor is a board member of the ASHRAE Florida West Coast Chapter, serving as treasurer this year, as well as serving as secretary in ASPE's Central Florida Chapter.

Vickery & Company is also active in ASPE's Central Florida Chapter, ASHRAE's Central Florida Chapter, National Fire Protection Association, and Florida Fire Sprinkler Association.

"Because we provide engineered systems, our team understands the needs of engineers and system designers," says Proctor. "We know that each system is unique and you have to consider the entire project as a whole—and size the equipment accordingly." The firm also provides solutions to the engineering and construction challenges inherent in small-footprint projects.

Another of Vickery & Company's strengths is the ability to design a system and provide complete AutoCAD drawings for a project, adds Proctor. "That way the engineer isn't getting something from a catalog—it's a specific system. We don't charge for this service, which is a real, time-saving benefit to them."

Proctor notes that the firm is also active in designing and engineering "green" solutions, such as rainwater-collection systems that help owners and developers meet U.S. Green Building Council's Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) criteria.

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"There's also been a movement in recent years for the local governments to request domestic water supply packages for their hurricane shelters in case the municipal water becomes contaminated," he adds. "We work with the engineering firms to design cost-effective systems for different sizes of shelter facilities."

In the fire protection sector, Vickery & Company continues to design more and more packaged systems, says Barber. For example, the firm prepared a diesel fire pump package for Pasco-Hernando Community College. "They are getting a fully enclosed, fire-protection package," he says. "They just pour the concrete, set it with a crane, make the field connections and walk away."

Specifying a SyncroFlo package system means that Vickery & Company can design the water and fire connections, assemble the package, and ship it in one piece to the field, Barber adds. "That cuts both the installation time and the costs to the contractor. And since the package gets a U.L. listing, we also provide the engineer with single-source responsibility."

#### GROWTH STRATEGIES IN A SLOW MARKET

Like almost all Florida businesses, Vickery & Company is pursuing strategies designed for success in a slower marketplace. "Without question, the economy is the number one challenge for all of us," says Barber. "At the same time, there continues to be growth opportunities, regardless of current conditions, and we made a clear decision to stay ahead of the curve."

To achieve its business goals, Vickery & Company has adopted a multi-pronged market strategy that includes investing in a new Web site and marketing program to raise the

firm's profile. "Due to the slowdown in the economy, there are fewer new projects out there," he adds. "We think it's important for us to get our name out there."

Meanwhile, Vickery & Company is playing a key role in some of Central Florida's most complex commercial projects. In the Orlando area, for instance, the firm is involved with Rosen Shingle Creek Resort and Hilton at Orlando Convention Center, providing hot water heaters, booster systems, and pool heating systems for both hospitality projects.

In Sarasota, Vickery & Company retrofitted the county courthouse, changing out the constant-speed controls on an older booster system. "Now the system runs on variable speeds," says Proctor, "so it will need less maintenance and require less electricity, reducing the client's operational costs."

In Gainesville, Vickery & Company is supplying a new lift station for Shands Hospital, and in Tampa the firm's projects include Channelside, Slade condominium, and Westin Hotel at Rocky Point.

Summing up the company's philosophy, Barber says, "We approach each project seriously, with integrity, and strive to provide the best solution within our client's scope. We also make a conscious effort never to under- or over-design, giving our clients precisely what they need for any specific project. It's a strategy that works well in any market conditions."

Recently Barber was added to the Editorial Advisory Council of the *Florida Plumbing Perspective* magazine. □□□

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