

# Wisconsin Perspective™

May-June 2008

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## Design Air providing expertise on today's HVAC markets

When Dan Vertz needs support in serving one of his HVAC customers, he turns to Design Air, a full-service heating, ventilation, and air conditioning wholesaler based in Kimberly.

"Their design department helps our company with plans that need state approval and advises us on code issues," says Vertz, vice president, J&D Heating & Cooling, Inc. in De Pere. "Design Air also provides us with a knowledgeable sales person who keeps us abreast of the latest changes in the HVAC industry, new equipment, and products. And to top it off, they have great service with daily delivery to our shop, so we don't need to run and pick up materials."

For more than 35 years Design Air has been providing that high level of service and support to Wisconsin's heating and cooling contractors. Long recognized as a leader in the design of efficient, cost-effective HVAC systems, Design Air is also a major supplier of forced-air and hydronic heating systems and HVAC supplies, servicing clients throughout eastern Wisconsin and upper Michigan.

"We combine the skills of knowledgeable professionals using computer-assisted design (CAD) with timely delivery, industry training, reliable products, and competitive pricing to give our customers an edge in the marketplace," says Bill Riley, sales manager. "Our company's mission is delivering the best products, services and solutions when you need them."

Riley adds that the company's inside sales and support team is highly experienced, with knowledgeable specialists assigned to different product lines and categories. "We have a wealth of information on the HVAC market that we put at the disposal of our customers," he says.

Today the 64-employee company has seven facilities strategically situated in Wisconsin and the Upper Peninsula to provide convenient, accessible service to contractors. "We can service the rural areas as well as the region's metropolitan markets," says Riley.

A wholly owned subsidiary of U.S. Oil Company, Inc., Design Air can utilize the services of U.S. Transportation to offer no-cost daily deliveries to the region and multiple daily deliveries in some markets. As Riley says, "We get many comments from contractors about how they appreciate our delivery service."

### FORCED-AIR AND HYDRONICS HEATING

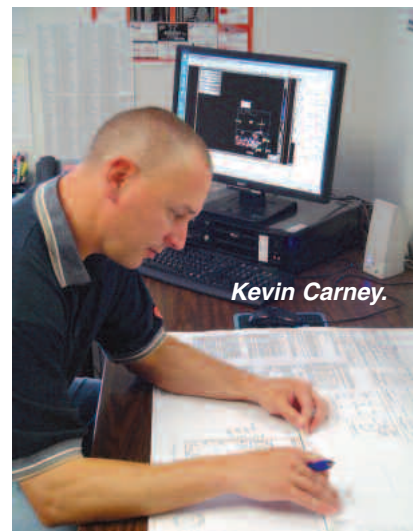
While Design Air is a full-service wholesaler with a broad range of HVAC products, the company puts a particular emphasis on serving the forced-air and hydronics heating markets, according to Terry Grissman, general manager. Design Air is well versed in the nuances of these systems, thanks to an experienced eight-person design and support team that includes six State of Wisconsin registered designers and a professional engineer.

"Our design service lies at the core of our organization," says Grissman. "We have really built our business through the years around our design capabilities, and we take pride in providing our customers with the experienced support they need to serve their end users."

Design Air's team focuses on designing systems for the light commercial and residential markets, including multi-family buildings, offices, warehouses, shopping centers, and restaurants.

"Our design engineers are located in multiple locations to assist our customers," adds Grissman. They work with architects and HVAC contractors in the design of systems, provide energy calculations, and assist in state-approval requirements.

"We have built our business around our design services, but because of our product and supply strength, we are able to meet the requirements of the majority of HVAC professionals," adds Grissman.



Kevin Carney.

Today Design Air is also putting an increasing emphasis on geo-thermal heating systems with designers and product managers who work with the company's customers on designing and installing these energy-efficient, environmentally friendly systems.

"With energy costs continuing to rise, we see geo-thermal as a growing market area for Wisconsin contractors. These systems allow homeowners and commercial customers to stay comfortable in a more efficient manner."

While geo-thermal systems have been available for some time, they're getting increasing attention in the market now," Riley adds. "The equipment, such as our line of Florida Heat Pump (FHP), is better featured to meet today's demand for super-efficient systems than the systems of the past. With the rising cost of gas and oil, everyone is looking for greater efficiency. FHP Geo-thermal systems can reduce energy use by as much as 60 percent."

Grissman notes that radiant heating has also come into its own. "A decade ago, there was a much greater emphasis on forced air," he recalls. "Now, radiant heating is probably 25 percent of our business, and we expect that segment to keep increasing."

Solar heating systems offer another growth opportunity for the company—and for the state's contractors. Riley says, "Homeowners may want to look at multiple approaches for heating and cooling, and contractors now have more tools available to serve them."

Indoor air quality (IAQ) is an increasing concern for homeowners, office workers, and owners of multifamily buildings and commercial establishments. Design Air offers the Venmar line as one of the new generation of products that address IAQ issues on a more economical basis than in the past," says Riley. "As homes become 'tighter' to reduce heating and cooling issues, the indoor air continues to recirculate and needs to be properly conditioned."

## GROWING FOR 36 YEARS

Design Air opened its doors back in 1972 in a humble 1,000-square-foot location in Combined Locks, Wis. Two years later the company relocated to Kimberly, which has remained its headquarters through 36 years of growth.

In 1989, Green Bay became Design Air's second location with the acquisition of Christy Supply, and a third location was added in West Allis in 1995. Next came a facility in Iron Mountain, Mich., in 1997, which enabled the company to offer on-site inventory and support throughout eastern Wisconsin and upper Michigan.

Design Air acquired Schwab Furnace Company in Milwaukee in 1999 and opened a new warehouse in Wausau in 2003. In 2004 the company opened its Madison warehouse, bringing its operations to seven outlets with more than 150,000 square feet of combined warehouse space. Growth

continued in 2007 with the acquisition of Heating Design & Supply in Wausau and the relocation of the Madison operation to a larger, more access-friendly facility.

"We are always looking for opportunities to expand in other Wisconsin markets through acquisition or strategic growth," says Grissman.

"Within the company, each department is a team, and each team is specialized for maximum customer support. The sales team is comprised of inside and outside sales professionals who work in tandem to provide efficient customer service," says Grissman.

To support the sales effort, product managers are available to Design Air's customers for technical assistance. These product managers specialize in knowing the "particulars" of product lines such as Rheem, WeatherKing, Crown, Utica, Modine, Hi-Velocity Systems, Triangle Tube, Empire, Sanyo, Space-Ray, Venmar, and FHP (Bosch/Florida Heat Pump).



*Front row (left to right):*

*Jerry Passow, Roger Lieske, Jason Seifert, and Bill Riley.*

*Back row (left to right):*

*Tom Richard, Al Zablocki, Keith Schleif, and Doug Davis.*

Other product managers specialize in parts and supplies, since Design Air offers more than 380 product lines and stocks 15,000-plus parts. Many of the company's technical representatives are veterans who have been with Design Air for a decade or longer. "Having associated with that type of longevity and experience really helps them understand both current and past products, so they can support our customers with all the technical and application advice they need," Grissman adds.

In keeping with that philosophy of customer support, Design Air's training department provides educational programs and seminars to provide up-to-date information on products, services, applications and business management.

Led by Mike Mills, the company's own trainer, Design Air offers a long list of classes each month through its "Design Air University." Classes cover the HVAC industry and include EPA certification, NATE training, business development programs, and sales training offerings. Design Air's programs are offered in its different geographic markets so contractors can increase their knowledge while staying close to home.

In turn, Design Air's employees also participate in a wide range of programs that include product and customer service training. Summing up the company's approach, Grissman says, "Continuous improvement is a way of life at Design Air. We strive to do things better so we can continue to be the wholesaler of choice for HVAC contractors." ■ ■ ■

*Permission to reprint this article regarding Design Air was provided courtesy of Wisconsin Perspective™ magazine, a publication for Wisconsin and U.P. plumbing, mechanical, and HVAC-R-related industries.*

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