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COMPANY BACKGROUND

Dallas Plumbing Company Celebrates 100 Years

Life was much more basic then. There were more horses than automobiles. Teddy Roosevelt was president, Oklahoma was not yet a state and World War I was still over a decade ahead. The Wright brothers launched their maiden flight at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina and Ford Motor Company was officially incorporated with Henry Ford as vice president and chief engineer.

If you had been one of the 50,000 Dallasites in need of a plumber in 1903, you had no Yellow Pages, but you could find help in the Dallas City Directory, where the phone numbers were only three digits. One new listing had a particularly easy number to remember. It was 103 and the company was the new Dallas Plumbing Company. The listing placed by proprietor and founder, Henry Butcher, promised "the best in sanitary plumbing, gas fitting, and sewerage." The address was listed as 108 Field Street. Mr. Butcher changed locations in the downtown Dallas area a couple of times until his death in 1914. His widow, Carrie Butcher, then sold the venture to an employee, Clarence L. Dickerson, who later with his wife, Mary, built the Dickerson Chapel beside the First Methodist Church in downtown Dallas. The couple is also memorialized at the Scottish Rite Hospital for their immeasurable support of that institution and its work with children. Ward Downs, the first of the four generations of same-family owners, had been hired as an apprentice under the original owner in 1918 and began serving the plumbing needs of Dallas customers from his horse-drawn wagon. The Dickerson-Downs relationship began to prosper along with the company and Mr. Downs became a partner a few years after he joined the company. The two families shared their personal and business lives, even living in the same house for many years.

As the city grew, so did Dallas Plumbing Company. In 1922, it was moved to a new, larger facility at 2425 McKinney, where it remained in expanding quarters for the next 63 years. Their services to builders and homeowners also expanded with the addition of a plumbing fixture, bathroom and kitchen showroom. Under Mr. Dickerson's direction, the firm became the largest plumbing contracting and service firm in the city. Following her husband's death in 1950, Mary Dickerson became president, sharing ownership with Ward Downs. Mrs. Dickerson had joined her late husband in the business in 1918 and remained active in the business until her retirement as chairman in 1980. She was a young bride from Georgia when she began helping out at her husband's plumbing business. In a quote from a 1954 issue of the Dallas Magazine (then published by the Dallas Chamber of Commerce), she states, " 'Plumbing back then was largely exposed. It was the day of high-back, wall-hung sinks and the old, instantaneous water heaters which you lighted when you wanted hot water. One day my husband came back from work discouraged and said he had lost the last man in the office—due to the World War I draft. " 'I'll come down and answer the phone for you,' " answered the young bride, whose only professional experience was as a registered nurse. " 'That was December 26, 1918 and I've been coming down ever since.' "

In 1951, Mrs. Dickerson and Mr. Downs expanded into the air conditioning business as a dealer for a brand owned by another centennial company, Carrier Corporation, founded in 1902. Today, Dallas Plumbing Company continues as one of the largest Carrier dealers in North Texas.

From that early beginning, Dallas Plumbing Company has survived and thrived as the oldest and one of the largest plumbing, heating and air conditioning companies in the area, spanning four generations of family management. Ward Downs succeeded Mrs. Dickerson as president in 1969, followed by son, Fred, in 1970. His grandson, John, joined the company in 1966 and became the third generation president in 1981. John continues to lead the company today with his brother, Michael, as executive vice president. John's daughter, Cindy, serves as vice president.

The company has helped construct some of the most prominent homes and structures in Texas. In 1934, Dallas was selected host city for the 1936 Texas Centennial Exposition, celebrating the state's independence from Mexico. Among a labor force of 8000 workers, Dallas Plumbing Company helped build what is now the nation's largest collection of Art Deco buildings that are designated as National Historic Landmark at the State Fair of Texas. In Highland Park and the Park Cities, the company originated plumbing and heating in many of the cities' signature homes, serving these communities from its McKinney Avenue location. Another significant landmark, Highland Park Village, was also a Dallas Plumbing Company project in 1931. Located in the heart of Highland Park, the Spanish style center remains a popular shopping venue for local residents and visitors. Today, the company still serves the plumbing and air conditioning needs of many of the families now living in these original homes the company helped build many decades ago.

During World War II, the company helped build barracks and support structures in the Dallas area for our armed services, while continuing to serve local residences and businesses. The Dallas Historical Society includes Dallas Plumbing Company in its recently published list of Dallas Cornerstone Companies, an honor bestowed on companies founded in and doing business in Dallas for eight decades or more.

Today, with a fleet of almost 100 trucks and over 100 employees, Dallas Plumbing Company currently serves builders, commercial and residential customers in Dallas and throughout North Central Texas and beyond. The company's headquarters and showroom are located in northeast Dallas at 11055 Plano Road. Products and services include residential and commercial plumbing, heating and air conditioning for existing homes and new construction. Their Kitchens & Baths Showroom, at the same location, offers name brand faucets, fixtures, sinks, showers, toilets, tubs, lavatories and whirlpools for individuals, remodelers, builders and decorators.

Web sites: www.dallasplumbing.com, www.kitchensandbathsdallas.com

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