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TRUSTED SOURCE



IR-G adds new product lines and plans to upgrade its software to become more efficient while continuing to provide personalized service. **Page 56**

www.ir-g.com / Revenue: \$10 million / Headquarters: Nashville, Tenn. / Employees: 38 / Specialty: Industrial hoses and gaskets
 / Donna Nock, vice president: "We are incredibly responsive to our customers and go above and beyond to get the customer taken care of."



IR-G says there is not an industry it can't serve or supply with its industrial hoses and gaskets.

Trusted Source

IR-G adds new product lines and plans to upgrade its software to become more efficient while continuing to provide personalized service. **BY JANICE HOPPE-SPIERS**

R-G's adaptability and its belief that trust is the most valuable thing one can earn has served the company well over the past 28 years. The company has become a well-respected distributor in the industrial hoses and gaskets industry by staying true to its word and its dedication to solving customers' problems.

"It was instilled in us as children and certainly instilled in all our employees that we do what we say we are going to do," President Mark Fournier says. "Companies say that, but we do it. If we can't do it, we get out ahead of it and explain why this happened."

"We take responsibility if something

goes wrong, which generally goes a long way with people."

Fournier's parents, George and Joyce Fournier, purchased Industrial Rubber & Gasket – now known as IR-G – out of bankruptcy court in 1989.

"My father had worked for a lot of large companies and was at a point in his life where he wasn't interested in doing that any longer," Fournier explains. "He was looking for a business – it could have been any business."

In 1993, Fournier came to work at the family business after graduating college. At that time, IR-G was a 2,500-square-foot single-location company in Nash-

ville. Two years later, the company moved to a larger space in the city that provided more visibility. From 1997 through 2014, IR-G opened four more locations to serve its customers' needs. IR-G's headquarters remains in Nashville and its branch locations are in Cookeville and Clarksville, Tenn., Blytheville, Ark., and Decatur, Ala.

Fournier's sister Donna Nock joined their parents' company in 2007 and is the vice president of the company today. "We are incredibly responsive to our customers and go above and beyond to get the customer taken care of," she says. "We have that personal touch and no e-com-

merce still. It's against current trends, but we continue to have those important human interactions with our customers."

CUSTOMER CARE

IR-G serves a variety of industries and Nock says there is not an industry the company can't service or supply. Having the diversification of customers that the company does has enabled it to be buffered from one industry really affecting its business. "There is a lot of steel currently being imported from China, so we will see how that plays out in the new administration," Fournier says. "I would love to see the steel mills begin thriving again here."

Steel mills are significant in Arkansas. Tier 1 automotive is continuing to grow in Tennessee and the chemical industry is big in Alabama, but all of IR-G's locations have a broad customer base.

The food industry has become a large

segment of IR-G's business in the last several years. The company is now able to supply FDA compliant belting, hoses and fittings, as well as multiple metal detectable products, which are important for food safety. "We realized during the recent recession that food was a stable industry," Nock says. "People have to eat, which is why it's an industry that was not majorly affected by the economic downturn. People started eating at home more and food manufacturing has done well."

IR-G remains flexible to its customers' needs and the safety concerns in the food industry. For example, in January Fournier and two associates attended training for the company to become a 3-A certified hose distributor. "That is a big deal for all these companies, especially with the listeria scares and things like that," Fournier says. "They want a 3-A certified hose distributor, so we took on the additional cost

of training to help our customers and realize more sales."

NEW LINES

Last year, the company increased the size of its headquarters and expanded its Cookeville location by 30 percent to make room for additional product lines. "It has been our general philosophy to grow product lines and is one of the reasons we expanded," Fournier says. "We were completely out of room in Nashville and Cookeville. We moved to a much larger location in Nash-

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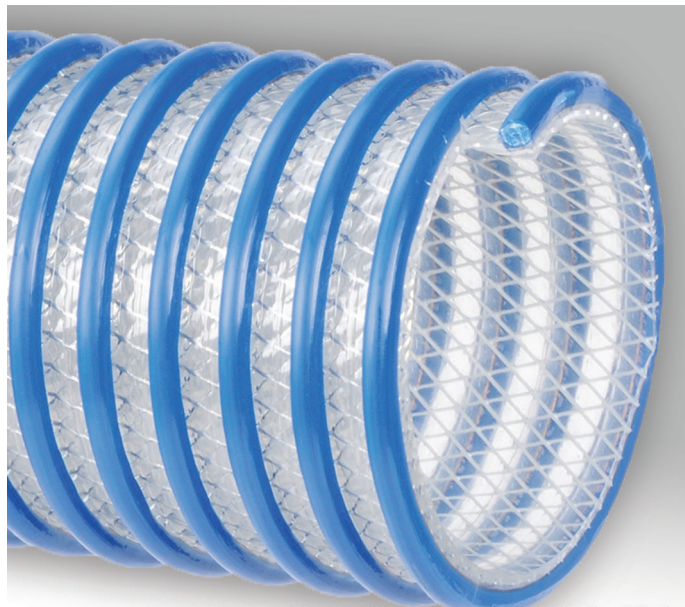
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ville, more than doubling our square footage. In our Cookeville facility, we added warehouse space and retrofitted the offices to create more space enabling us to better serve our customers.”

A new product line for IR-G is Gates Corp.’s secondary line of economy hoses. “It’s one of those things that can’t be mixed in with our normal inventory so we needed to make a separate work cell just for that hose line,” Fournier says. “Before the expansion, we couldn’t have done that.”

The new line will offer IR-G an opportunity to work with hydraulic OEMs, a market it has typically been priced out of, Fournier says. “We picked up one new customer and a second one we did a small initial order for so we will probably pick them up too,” he adds. “This is not designed to replace what we are selling to our existing customers who buy the premier line of Gates.”

IR-G will build the work cell and purchase needed equipment to begin offering Gates’ new hose. “The price is the difference, pressure ratings and performance,” Fournier says. “Sometimes people are looking for low-cost on everything and if the hose does not have as long of a life span, they are perfectly fine with that instead of putting in a premium Gates hose that might last 10 to 15 years. There is a significant cost difference to that.”



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INTERNAL INVESTMENTS

IR-G will implement a new ERP system this year that it expects will increase efficiency. The company also upgraded its CRM software to a system that transcribes the salesperson’s phone conversations with customers, which are then saved onto a database and easily accessible. “We have all the notes and that has definitely given the company more information about our customers,” Nock explains. “It made for an easier transition when we had a long-term salesman retire last spring; the new salesman had lots of information about his new customers.”

The company also prides itself on investing in its people. IR-G is actively involved with NAHAD’s Hose Safety Institute, which provides a forum for distributors, manufacturers, suppliers and end-users and industry organizations to support and promote hose assembly safety, quality and reliability. “There are a total of five different tests that we have our employees take and they get certified every time they take one of the tests,” Fournier explains. “We also received an award from Gates for sending more of our employees to their training in the past decade than any other distributor.”

IR-G is always searching for new certifications and training opportunities. “If someone says they want to know more, we find out if there is training for it,” Nock says. “We have sent employees to a week-long course at the University of Innovative Distribution where they earn credits towards a certification from Purdue University.” Employees have also attended numerous on-site trainings offered by IR-G’s suppliers.

IR-G remains successful by taking care of its employees first and its suppliers second. “We understand that when our employees and suppliers are treated well, our customers will be treated exceptionally well,” Fournier says. “Our mission has remained constant: to consistently produce and promptly deliver the highest-quality industrial supply products and services to our customers.” □

