

SUPPLYHOUSE

TIMES



MEET THE 2024 PVF RING OF HONOR INDUCTEE: SERVICE METAL



Service Metal Executives, left to right: VP of Business Development Ken Gebhardt, President Tim Williamson, VP of Operations Brad Schneider, VP of Sales Jim Fears. *Photo by Patrick Lanham Photography*

MEET THE 2024 PVF RING OF HONOR INDUCTEE: SERVICE METAL

Service Metal celebrates 70 years of exceptional speed and service.

By: Natalie Forster

In a volatile and increasingly competitive industrial PVF market, businesses need a reliable inventory source they can trust. Consistency, quick decision-making and transparency are the guiding lights that have driven St. Louis-based PVF master distributor Service Metal to 70 years of evolving success.

"A True North for our company has always been making things faster and easier for our customers," says Tim Williamson, President and 3rd-generation leader. "When we are faced with decisions, the correct answer is always whatever choice will make business faster and easier for our businesses partners."

This commitment is why Service Metal has been inducted into Supply House Times' PVF Ring of Honor in 2024. The PVF Ring of Honor was created to recognize PVF manufacturers and master distributors that have enjoyed recent success in the marketplace through the execution of progressive and cutting-edge best practices. Service Metal is the 11th inductee joining Raritan Group (2023), ASC Engineered Solutions (2022), Charlotte Pipe (2021), NIBCO (2020), Midland Industries (2019), Merfish Pipe & Supply (2018), United Pipe & Supply (2017), Apollo Valves (2016), Penn Machine (2015) and Industrial Valco (2014).

Founded in 1954 by amateur boxer and entrepreneur John C. Seitz, Service Metal started out as a valve refurbishing surplus machine shop. Through his connections working in the brewing industry, Seitz worked his way into the valve refurbishing business. In the 1970s, he saw opportunity to serve the market by providing new factory product. From there, the master distributor has grown to be a team of approximately 150 employees across four locations nation-wide – St. Louis, Missouri, Charlotte, North Carolina, Houston, Texas and Salt Lake City, Utah.

LASTING RELATIONSHIPS

Williamson says that Service Metal's vision is to be the most respected master distributor in the industry. "The goal isn't to be the largest or to have the most market power," he says. "We want to create long term relationships."

Service Metal has certainly succeeded in building and maintaining lasting relationships, and Williamson points out, it starts with employee relationships. Jim Fears, vice president of sales, has been with the company 30 years while Ken Gebhardt, vice president of business development, has worked at Service Metal for more than 40 years. The business is home to many other tenured employees.

"These strong internal relationships roll into long term customer relationships," Williamson says. "Every decision we make and every interaction we are a part of is aimed toward building a long term, trusted relationships where we provide value for all parties involved."

According to Fears, one of the major turning points for Service Metal was the expansion of its executive team. "For years we had a small management team who did a tremendous job," he says. "But we were working in and on the business at the same time. Expanding to create a strong executive team has allowed us to take off, fuel growth, and refrain from being bottlenecked on the things we were doing daily."

Gebhardt, who started with the company in 1981, joined a very different Service Metal than what you see today. "The company truly hit a turning point in 2013 when Tim and his wife Christina came into the



Early Service Metal Storefront, 1954.

Photo by Patrick Lanham Photography

SERVICE METAL MISSION, VISION AND VALUES

Mission: We strive to make the customer experience easier and faster through world-class customer service with a commitment to excellence, integrity, and efficiency.

Vision: To become the most respected PVF master distributor in the industry.

Values: Integrity, Commitment, Urgency

business," he says. "They were able to take the great reputation and foundation we had and turn us into a truly professional business culture that can compete in today's competitive marketplace."

Service Metal employees happily vouch for the company's emphasis on positive relationships. Laura Lagraba, sales representative, has been part of the Service Metal team for 11 years and says the company's commitment to "world-class service" is important to her.

"We have a special focus on customer service and implementing daily our mission of 'making the customer experience faster and easier through world-class service'. We go above and beyond to ensure the customer is taken care of, which is important to me."

Lagraba adds that the company culture keeps employees motivated. "Our company promotes a positive work environment where we feel valued and motivated. I particularly appreciate the open door communication, employee recognition, and our leadership that honors our company values."

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Service Metal Associates in St. Louis. *Image courtesy of DBA Marketing*

Chris Heritage, supply chain manager, agrees, adding that the company views goals as shared endeavors. "Service Metal is a collective of team oriented, hardworking people. We set goals and go after them as team. And we love to celebrate and recognize all the wins, big and small, and all the team members' contributions, throughout the process of achieving those goals."

Echoing Williamson's note on decision-making that best benefits the customer, Heritage adds that Service Metal's goal is to build trust with every customer they have. "The decisions we make daily and the ones with long term consequence, are made with the highest consideration for our customers' best interests. We also invest in technology to support team members at every level of the organization."

SENSE OF URGENCY

Service Metal's core values include integrity, commitment and urgency. Brad Schneider, vice president, operations and supply management, points out that many companies share similar core values, but

what sets Service Metal apart from the competition is its sense of urgency. "We operate in a way that prioritizes moving forward," he says. "We can't wait around, we have to get an answer, and we have to make decisions."

Throughout seven decades, Service Metal has witnessed its fair share of PVF market changes. Fears notes that the speed and scale of doing business have changed, making it even more important to focus on passing down values and building relationships.

"We've always had long term relationships with many smaller, family-owned companies. But nowadays, a lot of those are merging with larger, multi-branch companies," he says. "Thankfully, we've been able to pass down our mission, vision and values so that these companies spread the word that Service Metal is who you want to do business with."

Fears adds that it's more challenging now to build new relationships as everyone has more on their plates and less time. "There is constant change and people are doing more with less," he says. "Everyone is working so hard and fast, managing more people, etc., so we have to continue to establish ourselves everyday as a



Service Metal Corporate, Sales, & Management Team. Photo by Patrick Lanham Photography

strong, long term partner, and be creative in how we communicate to build relationships.”

In a market saturated with mergers and acquisitions, Williamson says Service Metal takes advantage of its role. “We believe that by bucking the trend of acquisitions and consolidations within the market, that we place ourselves to the advantage because the core philosophy of who we are, and who our core team is, has been and will continue to be stable in the market.”

Williamson adds that customers have said that Service Metal is a “breath of fresh air,” in a volatile marketplace. “Our customers can pick up the phone and reach any member of our executive team any day,” he says. “That part of us, and the core values we have around customer service, urgency and relationships, will never change.”

WHAT YOU NEED, WHEN YOU NEED IT

The role of the master distributor has evolved over the years, and Service Metal is always working ahead in order to meet the demands of customers.

“We’re always planning at least 10 years out,” Williamson says. “And each year we basically create a new 10 year plan. This gives us the ability to make those long term decisions for the business that help our employees commit to us as we show our commitment to them. When employees are comfortable in their place in the future of the company, they’re more equipped to develop those long lasting customer and vendor relationships.”

Inventory management is certainly a challenge for master distributors as they face uncertain market conditions. According to Fears, it’s essential today to carry large amounts of inventory. “While trying to balance inventory with demand in the market, customers are stocking less and less, and they’re depending on us to have what they need in stock for them at any given time.”

One major way Service Metal meets the needs customers is through its “Speed to Ship” metrics. Ninety two percent of orders that are to ship parcel are expected to ship out the same day the order comes in, and the company only gives itself a one-

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Service Metal Associate in Houston.

Photo by Patrick Lanham Photography

hour window to finish all of the last orders that come in at the end of each day.

On the same token, 90% of will call orders are ready for pick up the same day. "We have invested heavily in technology to automate our system," Schneider says. "Customers are notified as soon as we're done picking that their order is ready for pickup."

It is clear that Service Metal distributor customers appreciate the commitment to readily available inventory and quick order processing. Chris Kapeller, a buyer for American Piping Products, says Service Metal is a valuable part of his own company's success. "Service Metal's extensive inventory, knowledgeable sales staff and excellent warehouse



Shipping an order from Saint Louis.

Photo by Patrick Lanham Photography

operations has led them to become a top supplier of fittings, flanges and valves," he says. "We can trust that with every order we send, material supplied will be shipped correct and on time. Their friendly sales staff are always eager to pick up the phone and work through any questions regarding specifications and tolerances, should they arise."

Brandy Carrington, purchasing agent at Eastern Industrial Supplies agrees, adding that Service Metal is incredible in tune with the market. "We have a decades-long partnership with Service Metal and they have always been a high class organization," she explains. "They prove themselves day in and day out with excellent customer service and being in tune with where the market is, along



Kevin Hyman, Director of Operations.

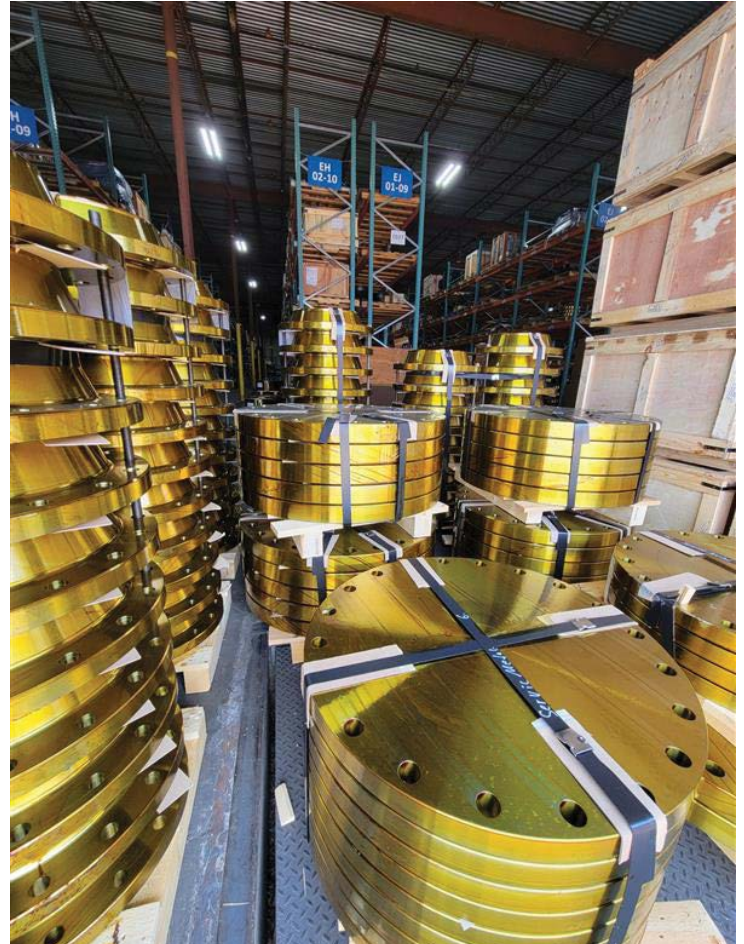
Photo by Patrick Lanham Photography

with knowing what their customers truly need. Their creativity in how they can support their customers has always been a standout to us, and as we're navigating new avenues like e-commerce, they have been imperative to our success."

TRUE TO THE CORE

Although Service Metal has grown remarkably over the last several decades, the executive team agrees that they are proud to have maintained the core of who they are as an organization.

"We've committed to maintaining our mission, vision and values as we've grown," Fears says. "It's something that's very hard to do – going from a small company to the size we are now with the number



Service Metal Inventory.

Photo by Patrick Lanham Photography

of employees we have now – but everyone in the company knows and lives out our values daily, and we believe our customers reap the benefits of that."

"Service Metal is a fantastic partner. The sales and operations team do a great job handling our many needs. They are leaders with new technology that keeps them efficient and competitive. I've conducted business with Service Metal for twenty plus years and look forward to many more," – Craig McGilvray, American Stainless & Supply

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Service Metal Leadership, left to right: Director of IT Rob Lloyd, Director of HR Jack Webb, Controller Tina Cornett. *Photo by Patrick Lanham Photography*

Schneider says it has been incredible rewarding to see team members grow with the company. “We build up our team to promote from within,” he says. “Offering the training and support they need to grow to the next level is the most rewarding thing a business leader can witness.”

With its emphasis on quick decision-making, the executive team must put an immense amount of trust in one another. “The growth we’ve achieved over the past 15 years makes me extremely proud of the trust and ownership within this executive team,” Gebhardt says. “Working with this team makes each day fun while we face challenges head-on, making things that need to happen, happen.”

Williamson echoes the strength of the executive team, adding that they are the reason Service Metal is

able to be a better place to work day after day.

“Each of the executive team members is extremely talented in their roles,” he says. “You can see their commitment and hard work trickle down to their employees.”

Williamson adds that he’s proud and excited to play a vital role in supply house partners’ ability to support their customers. “We do everything we can to make it easy for our customer to compete in the marketplace by being a partner and being willing to have open dialogues and listen,” he says. “They can get myself, Ken, Brad or Jim on the phone any day – there is no small customer and no small complaint. I’m really proud of the culture of service and responsiveness we’ve built.”