

Midlands Business Journal

SEPTEMBER 22, 2017

THE WEEKLY BUSINESS PAPER OF GREATER OMAHA, LINCOLN AND COUNCIL BLUFFS

VOL. 43 NO. 38

Airgas seeks to capitalize on vitality of industrial sector

by Richard D. Brow

It's a dynamic time in the industry and with the recent consolidation of Airgas with Air Liquide, a multinational corporation with a presence in 80 countries, the new entity to be called Airgas (an Air Liquide company), is expected to operate from a strengthened platform in Nebraska and Iowa.

North Central Region President Denton Thompson, whose responsibilities include overseeing Airgas operations in Nebraska and Iowa and 233 employees, said Airgas' strengths ideally position the new company for greater future growth and long-term value creation and with more than \$300 million in synergies, an opportunity to strengthen global leadership in the industrial gas industry.

Thompson said service to the metal fabrication industry in eastern Nebraska and western Iowa provides Airgas with the largest share of its revenues, followed by construction and the food/beverage/retail category.

Products available locally include: industrial welding gases, welders and accessories, welding support equipment, filler metals, gas equipment and accessories, welding gas equipment, balloon regulators, clothing, area protection, gloves, head, eye and face protection, respiratory protection, first aid, hearing protection, fire equipment, abrasives and cutting tools.

The firm's main retail and distribution center is at 10433 J St. in Omaha. Another facility at 1321 Mason St. sells dry ice. Other Nebraska locations are in Lincoln and Hastings. A north central region store is in Council Bluffs at 3018 Nebraska Ave. and an additional location in Sioux City serve western Iowa customers.

"In the Omaha and Council Bluffs area there's an increasingly large interest in micro-bulk liquid delivery systems to meet demands from food service and smaller medical customers to larger customers seeking a fit for one to two lasers," Thompson said.

Liquid nitrogen and liquid argon used in welding and other applications are growth areas.

Thompson said Airgas has been successful in Nebraska and Iowa, as well as in other parts of the country served, by developing a comprehensive national gas



North Central Region President Denton Thompson ... Aiming to gain traction with integration into multinational industrial gas corporation. (Photo by MJB / Noel Hoig)

supply chain for nitrogen, oxygen, argon, carbon dioxide, hydrogen and helium. By optimizing the balance between purchasing, producing and swapping product nationwide the firm is able to meet the lowest landed product cost.

Via a broad, redundant network of Airgas and third-party source plants, Airgas is able to maximize reliability, minimize risk, improve speed to market and provide product for growth.

Thompson, a Wyoming native with an associate's degree in welding and fittings, is a 19-year veteran of the industry.

He said the proximity to major customers, diversity of needs and long-time relationship with clients in eastern Nebraska and western Iowa has enabled Airgas, headquartered in Radnor Township, Penn., to allocate more of its resources to assist local customers.

For example, Airgas has 80 weld process specialists nationally. One is based in Omaha. The expertise offered includes advanced technical support in the area of welding for metal fabrication customers.

"The specialist evaluates current processes and provides suggested solutions to our customers that range from changes to

welding parameters, shield gas, filler metal, upstream processing, welding equipment and automation," Thompson said. "We work with customers who need to grow output where additional labor is difficult to find or not available."

The use of such expertise while an expense to Airgas, positions the firm to deepen its customer relationships in terms of both customer retention and securing new customers.

Another area of consulting expertise offered to customers is that of a bulk specialist. Airgas employs 80 nationally; one is located in Omaha.

"The aim is to make our customers' business more profitable," Thompson said. "They start by analyzing how a customer uses and manages gas, looking for opportunities to increase cost efficiencies."

Applications engineers are used to look at customer needs, applications and how products can be used more effectively. One of the strategies is to prepare a customized engineering solution for current and future production requirements. A thorough project plan of the installation is drafted that includes design, equipment and piping specifications so as to eliminate downtime

and boost efficiency of the new bulk gas supply system.

Airgas relies heavily on more than 30 strategic account representatives. One is located in Omaha.

Thompson said such specialists work

Airgas

Phone: 402-339-8080

Address: 10433 J St., Omaha 68127 (retail and distribution), plus six additional locations in Nebraska and Iowa.

Services: leading supplier of industrial, medical and specialty gases, and hard goods such as welding equipment and related products in the U.S.

Founded: 1982 by Peter McCausland with acquisition of local distributor Connecticut Oxygen

Employees: 233 in Nebraska and Iowa

One-year goal: Complete integration of Airgas into Air Liquide, an acquisition that began in May 2016.

Industry outlook: It is a dynamic time in the industry with the increasing demands of customers in a digital world.

Website: www.airgas.com

with customers to identify ways to improve efficiency, manage supply chain costs, and reduce the number of vendors they need to rely on. He said the idea is to identify a smaller number of suppliers to fulfill a wider range of products and services needed in every location.

Thompson said a differentiating factor in Airgas' growth is that the firm extends itself well beyond the traditional role of a supplier.

"As a true alliance partner, we help improve how our products are used and moved internally at facilities," he said. "Our supply chain management tool box provides the right solutions for customer operations."

Reprinted with permission
from the publisher of MJB Inc.
from the September 22, 2017 issue of the

Midlands Business Journal

This permission is for photo and article reproduction or placement on your Web site. Under no circumstances, because of spamming and other issues, will permission be granted to transmit our stories by e-mail.

Midlands
Business Journal

Airgas

Reprinted with permission from the publisher of MBJ Inc.
from the September 22, 2017 issue of the Midlands Business Journal.
This permission is for photo and article reproduction or placement
on your Web site. Under no circumstances, because of spamming and
other issues, will permission be granted to transmit our stories by e-mail.