



Company Business

The oil industry in southern Louisiana keeps the Radiator Service Company busy.

Along the most southern parts of Louisiana bordering the Gulf of Mexico is Terrebonne Parish. Established in 1882, it wasn't until 1929 that the oil and gas industry made a home there. With the discovery of offshore oil, the community grew rapidly and by the late 1970s oil was the county seat, Houma's, main focus.

It's in Houma that NARSA member and recent NARSA Heavy-Duty Certificate recipient, David Bienvenu, decided to buy a shop. Through his job as shop manager at a diesel-engine repair shop he met Bill Berkel, who started Radiator Service Company Inc. in 1988. Berkel had worked for a local radiator shop for 17 years before deciding to go out on his own and in his shop performed the heat transfer services for the diesel company Bienvenu worked for. Their friendship grew through the years and Bienvenu became interested in purchasing the Berkel's business, as he would soon be retiring. Bienvenu took over the shop on November 1, 1994, after Berkel was diagnosed with cancer. He passed away on December 3rd of that year, leaving Bienvenu with one employee and no radiator repair experience.

"I didn't have any experience with heat exchangers with exception of troubleshooting problems. I guess when you have debt and you're the owner of the shop, you figure it out," Bienvenu says. "I had the mechanical aptitude, and there were a lot of people in the industry who were really very helpful."

He goes on to list Dyrell Stokes, Kim Kool, Sulphur, La.; the staff at Crescent Radiators in Louisiana; M.H. Massey, Proliance, New Haven, Conn.; Bruce Huffman, Huffman Radiator Service,

Sinton, Texas; Bert Thompson, Johnny's Radiator Service, Farmington, N.M., and the folks at Global Heat Transfer, Edmonton Alberta, to name a few.

Bienvenu adds that once he started going to NARSA conventions he made even more connections. "It's hard to get information from close competitors, so meeting people who aren't in the same area was helpful. Whenever I had problems, or just needed to get some information, I could call these guys. I couldn't have done it without being a member of NARSA," he says.

The business at the Radiator Service Company is still pretty much the same as when he took it over. The only thing that has changed, as with most radiator repair shops, is that they don't do a lot of automotive work. "The oil companies require us to have \$5 million in insurance and after 9/11 we also needed to have a separate insurance policy for the automotive work. We just didn't do enough auto work to justify getting it. We might still do a little, but it's less than half a percent of what we do," Bienvenu says.

Today much of the work is still focused on drilling rigs and all that goes along with that. That means Bienvenu and his crew repair heat transfer systems on everything that has to do with drilling – that includes everything from the companies that pour the cement, to the folks who run the cranes, to the drillers. Radiator Service Company also does a lot of marine work.

Bienvenu does note, however, that through the years the rigs themselves have changed. While they used to be run by individual diesel engines for each component, they have changed to electric motors that

are now run by generators. Now, rather than having anywhere from 12 to 15 diesel engines, a rig will have that many electric motors with generators. That means fewer, but much larger, radiators for Bienvenu and his crew to repair.

While you might think that would mean less work, Bienvenu and businesses like his have been extremely busy. With a limited workforce and lots of work to do, Bienvenu has struggled to find people to do the work he needs done. "I've been able to maintain and hold my employees, but finding someone to jump in and pick up the extra work is hard," Bienvenu says. "For a while right after Hurricane Katrina the work was all coming at one time. It was tough trying to coordinate everything."

The Radiator Service Company employs seven people, including the administrative staff. Four technicians are HD certified and one more is in the process of obtaining his.

When asked why he pursued the certification, Bienvenu says he thought it would be good for them to be the first shop in Louisiana to get the certification. They were the first, and are still the only shop to achieve the certification in the state thus far.

He also thought it would make a good selling tool. "We get all these questionnaires from the oil companies asking about certifications and it was good to put on our info sheet that we're HD certified."

Bienvenu hopes to advertise and has plans of taking out an ad in the local paper, but so far he's been too busy. "We have the fortunate problem of having too much work to do," he quips. ■