

BusinessWest.com

THE BUSINESS JOURNAL OF WESTERN MASSACHUSETTS

Easthampton Electrical Diversifies into Untapped Markets

Kathleen Mitchell on July 28, 2015 in [Construction](#)

Staying Plugged in to Opportunity



David Mitowski and Tim Hodnicki stand near a van for Generator Boss, a new division created by Easthampton Electrical Services.

Easthampton Electrical Services, launched 60 years ago by Henry Mitowski, has always been entrepreneurial in nature, expanding from its roots in residential work to commercial customers, especially large apartment complexes. Today, this entrepreneurial bent continues with two new divisions, one focused on sales and service of home generators, and the other on a unique model for residential service. Overall, the company is keeping up with current trends — literally and figuratively.

Easthampton Electrical Services has been successful in a challenging niche market, and this track record is something President David Mitowski is quite proud of.

The company specializes in major apartment renovations, which is difficult work, because the units are usually occupied, and, unlike working in a new-construction setting, where electricians do their work and leave, they not only have to interact with residents, they also work alongside plumbers, carpenters, and other professionals who are doing renovations in the same unit at the same time.

“It takes a lot of teamwork and complex coordination, and can be slow and tedious,” said Mitowski. “We have to schedule things with the contractor and take part in daily and weekly meetings.”

The personality of their electricians factors heavily into the work because they need to be friendly and personable as the job may require moving tenants’ furniture, interacting with them, and explaining what they are doing.

“They need to put the tenant at ease, diffuse any animosity before it happens and do a really good job cleaning up. We leave a place in better shape than when we get there,” Mitowski said.

But while the company has thrived on this demanding playing field, it has by no means been limited to it.

Indeed, as the firm started 60 years ago by Mitowski’s father, Henry, soon after he finished his tour of duty with the Marine Corps, marks that milestone, it can also celebrate business diversity and an entrepreneurial spirit.

One could say that Easthampton Electrical has remained plugged in — figuratively speaking in this case — to changes within the industry and new and potentially lucrative opportunities.

The company has created two new divisions over the past few years, both of which are in the process of being trademarked.

The first, called Generator Boss, was born in response to recognized need after several recent weather calamities that created sizable and prolonged power outages, including the 2011 tornado and October nor’easter the same year.

As the names suggests, this venture involves the sale, installation, and service of home generators, and to date it has proven a sound addition to the company’s portfolio of services.

As has the other new division, called Electrical Experts, which is limited strictly to residential work, which runs the gamut from replacing an electrical outlet to resetting a circuit breaker or changing all of the wiring in a house.

What makes this service different from the way other contractors work is that everything has a pre-set price listed on a menu, and their trucks carry thousands of parts, making it highly unusual for an electrician to have to leave a job and return, which saves the homeowner and the company time and money.

Together, these various business divisions have made Easthampton Electrical a powerful player in the highly competitive local market, one with strong growth potential.

For this issue and its focus on construction, BusinessWest looks at the company's first 60 years of keeping the lights on, and how the future looks even brighter.

Watt's Happening

David Mitkowski said he started working with and beside his father when he was roughly 10 years old.

He told BusinessWest that all through high school and college, the plan was not to get involved with the family business. However, after graduating from college in 1973 with a degree in psychology, he realized he didn't want to continue his schooling, which was necessary to pursue a job in that field.

"I was at a crossroads," he said, while explaining why he decided to go join his father and eventually succeed him as president.

"My father had four employees at the time and did mostly small commercial and residential jobs, but I went to an estimating school and started bidding on big projects, such as schools and fire stations," he went on, adding that his father handled the smaller jobs as he transitioned the company into the commercial, industrial, and bid market.

Since that time, Easthampton Electric has renovated more than 2,000 apartments and approximately 2 million square feet of commercial and industrial space. It has also completed more than 100 new residential projects and an equal number of new commercial and industrial jobs.

"At one point in the 80s, we had 35 employees. But then the economy took a downturn and we had to scale back," Mitowski said, as he outlined the firm's history and its tradition of doing quality work.



David Mitowski says electricians at Easthampton Electrical Services are carefully chosen not only for their technical skills, but their ability to relate well to people.

Today, 75% of the company's work involves renovating apartments, and Mitowski said it has become known for its ability to excel in this area. And due to its long history, in some cases it is returning to places it has worked at in the past; for example, it handled the original electric work when Heritage Green in Sturbridge was built 25 years ago, and went back for a second time as it helped rehab the apartment complex and bring it up to current standards.

Personality and the willingness to help others also comes into play in this niche, because the tradespeople working in an apartment must be willing to help each other.

"We might need to help a plumber lift a sink into place, but they will turn around and help us later," Mitowski explained. "You can teach someone to do electrical work, but you can't teach them respect for others and give them a likeable attitude, and we put as much emphasis on that when we hire someone as we do on their skills."

The company recently finished rehabbing Colonial Estates in Springfield, and, overall, the work included installing new kitchens, bathrooms, lighting, smoke detectors, and safety upgrades in the 500-unit complex. "Right now, we're working on an apartment complex in Pittsfield and also just finished 100 units in Pittsfield," Mitowski said.

Although the atmosphere is not for everyone, Tim Hodnicki, who has been with the firm for 14 years and was recently named vice president, enjoys working in a team environment.

"We all come together to get a job done and try to complete it as quickly as possible. For example, everyone needed to revamp a kitchen goes in the same time and we may be able to install a brand new one in a day or two because we help each other," he said. "The tradespeople work as a unit, which helps to forge strong relationships and leads to repeat business. It's very different than working in new construction because everyone has to get along."

Amping Up

In many ways, though, the second generation of the company has been as entrepreneurial as the first, especially in recent years and with the addition of new business ventures.

These expansion efforts have involved seizing opportunities as they have presented themselves, said Mitowski, and this was especially true with Generator Boss.

He said the idea was formulated after he received a call from General Electric and Briggs and Stratton asking if he wanted to sell generators.

“We had installed commercial models, but realized no one in the area was installing whole home automatic generators,” he noted, adding that although people were buying them from local stores, they had to hire a plumber and electrician to install them, and if something went wrong, they had no way to know which professional to contact.

Hodnicki agreed, and said people appreciate not having to call different professionals.

“We do the entire installation and all the maintenance, which includes yearly oil changes,” he explained. “The generators have been really popular; they kick on as soon as the power goes off and keep the heat on in the winter and the air conditioning going in the summer.

“They’re especially important if people have a well or have medical issues,” he went on, adding that price varies depending on the size of the home and how much the homeowner wants to operate, but the cost typically ranges from \$5,000 to \$10,000.

“They give people independence and security during a storm,” Mitowski said. “We installed one in Chester and the homeowner called us later and told us he lost power the next day.”

Meanwhile, the decision to launch Electrical Experts was made last September after Mitowski once again received a call.

It came from Success Group International in Florida, which asked if he was interested in joining a network of providers that use the same small business plan, which includes a pre-set price system, and is based on a model that was created after defining best practices for plumbers, roofers, heating and air conditioning specialists, and electricians.

Mitowski said the concept appealed to him, because the company hadn’t done much residential work after he transitioned it into the commercial/industrial sector.

The new venture involved a tremendous amount of training, and prices had to be adjusted to fit the Western Mass. geographic area, but the new branch of the company opened in March and has done very well.

“We’re very responsive, and schedule specific service times so customers don’t have to wait for someone to show up,” Hodnicki said.

He spent an enormous amount of time and energy training the electricians assigned to the new division and new method of pricing, but says it eliminates inefficiencies and is more cost effective than the usual way of doing business.

Mitowski concurs. “In the past, people would call us with a problem and we would send an electrician to their home who might have to go to the store and get a part. After they returned to the office, we would price the visit and send the person a bill,” he said, adding that one of customers’ biggest complaints has always been that a job takes too long. “We realize some people work faster than others, but this doesn’t affect the customer now because we charge a uniform price and they know what the work will cost right down to the penny before we start.

“Payments are made immediately after we finish, and we can get people approved for financing if they need it,” he went on. “No one else in the area has a system like this.”

Customers can also elect to sign up for a yearly plan, which costs \$9.95 a month and gives them a discounted price on all services, a free annual inspection of their home’s electrical service, and waives any dispatch fees. “It includes checking every smoke detector and installing new batteries,” Mitowski said. “The yearly plan is especially good for people in older homes with aging electrical systems because we can keep an eye on things.”

Every electrician assigned to the division has been carefully screened and must undergo regular drug testing. “We believe it will help eliminate any doubts a homeowner might have about letting someone into their home,” Hodnicki said, adding that yearly background checks are also planned.

In addition, the company began installing EZ Breathe Ventilation Systems in people’s basements a year ago, a type of exhaust fan that can cover up to 7,000 square feet and maintain healthy humidity levels for \$2 to \$4 per month, eliminating the need for a dehumidifier.

“Before we decided to install the units we put one in the basement here. This building is about 100 years old and it got rid of the musty odor and all of the moisture,” Mitowski said, adding that the units cost \$1,500 to \$1,700 and bring fresh dry air into a basement while expelling odors, mold spores and contaminated air.

Wired for Growth

Mitowski is enthusiastic about the company's new ventures, and says Easthampton Electrical's future is bright.

"We have a lot of good things going on," he said. "Our new divisions have exceeded our expectations and we're very excited about their potential for success. We're looking to grow, and this gives us a better chance to serve the local community. Rehabilitation work is great, but we want to serve more homeowners and make sure they get the value for their dollar that they expect."

He added that Hodnicki wants to continue to expand the business, which is another bright spot for the company as it seeks out new ways to serve the residents of Western Mass. and Connecticut.