



**ASHRAE**

American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-Conditioning Engineers, Inc.

**La Crosse Area Chapter  
1998-1999**

**President**  
Mark Halderson  
The Halderson Corporation  
2827 So. 26<sup>th</sup> Street  
La Crosse, WI 54601  
608 788-8430  
FAX 608 787-0454

April 12, 1999

**President-Elect**  
Mike Byars  
The Trane Company, 12-1  
3600 Pammel Creek Road  
La Crosse, WI 54601  
608 787-2885  
FAX 608 787-3005

Mr. Michael C. Kearney  
Michael C. Kearney & Associates  
326 Sugar Creek Road  
Kirkwood, Missouri 63122

**Treasurer**  
Mike Byars  
The Trane Company, 12-1  
3600 Pammel Creek Road  
La Crosse, WI 54601  
608 787-2885  
FAX 608 787-3005

**Subject:** Gold Ribbon and Log Book of TIME AWARD  
17<sup>th</sup> Entry – History of a Company

**Secretary**  
John Hearn  
The Trane Company, 12-1  
3600 Pammel Creek Road  
La Crosse, WI 54601  
608 787-2521  
FAX 608 787-2669

Dear Mr. Kearney,

I am enclosing the La Crosse Area Chapter, 17<sup>th</sup> entry, for the Gold Ribbon and Log Book of TIME Award. The La Crosse Area Chapter, 115, is delighted to submit the History of a Company, First Supply Group, formerly La Crosse Plumbing Supply Company, a company that has over 100 years of plumbing, heating and ventilating business applying many ASHRAE principles.

**Board of Governors**  
Tom Ley  
The Trane Company, 12-1  
3600 Pammel Creek Road  
La Crosse, WI 54601  
608 787-4146  
FAX 608 787-2669

Thank you,

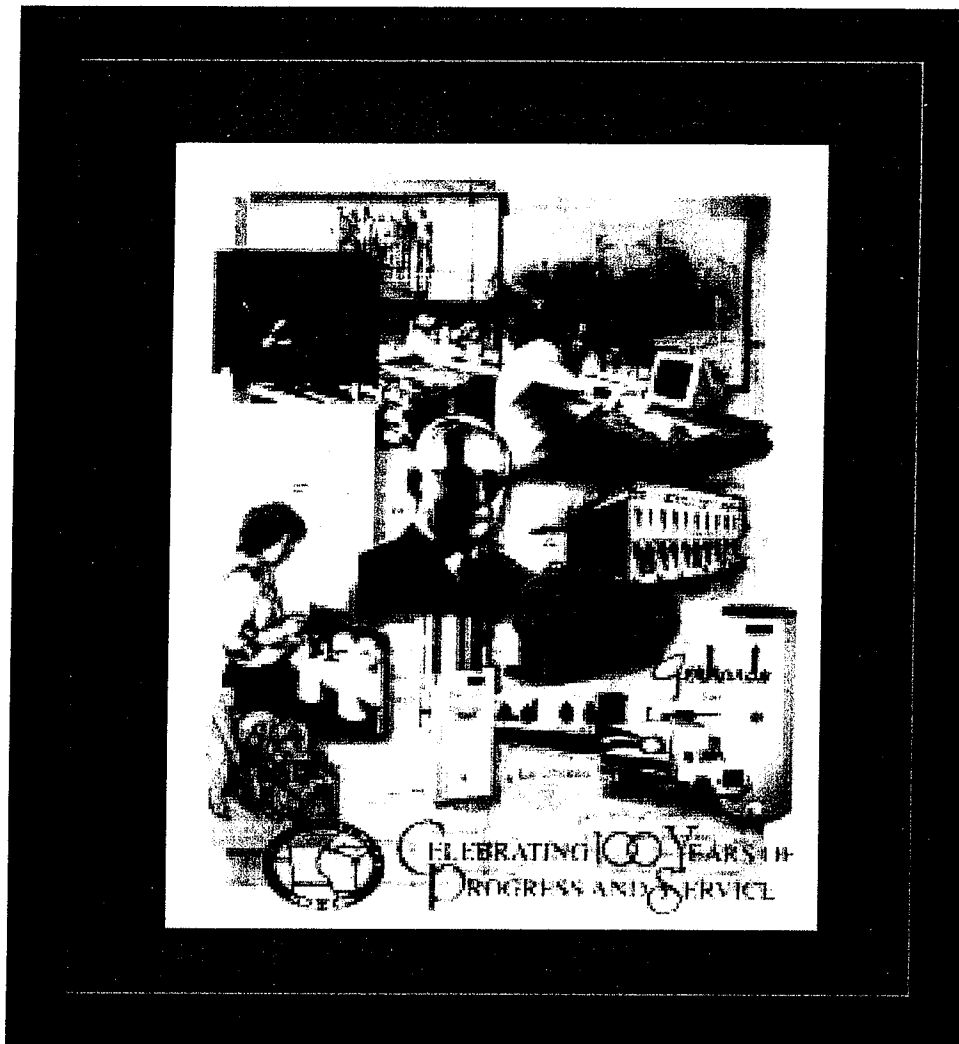
James M. Ritter, P.E.  
Chapter Historian  
La Crosse Area Chapter

John Gill  
EPH Mechanical Contractors  
111 Market Street  
Winona, MN 55987  
507 452-2096  
FAX 507 454-6070

Encl.

Bill Fox  
The Trane Company, 12-1  
3600 Pammel Creek Road  
La Crosse, WI 54601  
608 787-2252  
FAX 608 787-2669

CHAPTER MAY NOT ACT FOR SOCIETY



# FIRST SUPPLY GROUP

*The Midwest's premier wholesaler of professional contractor and industrial supplies*

## HISTORY OF A COMPANY

### **FIRST SUPPLY GROUP - A history spanning over 100 years**

Let's travel back in time, to 1897 when three men got together to form a new business in LaCrosse, Wisconsin. These three men were Reinie Wesson who managed the company from its inception to 1940, Henry Poehling, a plumber by trade who managed the warehouse, and Ed Roesler, a well driller who eventually became Henry Poehling's father-in-law. The new company began to distribute wrought iron pipe, plumbers supplies, windmills, pumps and those new-fangled gasoline engines. Its name, of course, was LaCrosse Plumbing Supply Company. This aggressive young company covered the states of Wisconsin, Iowa, Minnesota and South Dakota.

Originally, business was largely accomplished by shipping materials via railroad and steamboat. In those early days it was a common sight to see deliveries being made by LaCrosse Plumbing Supply Company's modern fleet of horse drawn wagons.

In those early years, the young company struggled financially, but due to some luck in having a large steel allocation during World War I, LPSC got on its feet financially. This money provided the capital for two early subsidiaries, a manufacturing plant to make cypress stock watering tanks, and the Star Windmill Company... Star windmills can still be seen today on the rural landscape.

In 1940, Henry's son Gerhard Poehling who had worked as both a truck driver and warehouseman, took over the business. The business prospered and thrived, until the great depression finally made things very difficult in the late thirties. Again steel played an important part of the company's destiny, when the company secured an order for the underground waterworks business at Fort McCoy during its buildup for World War Two. This order was shipped during the base allocation years for the war. This base allocation was used throughout the war years. Since LPSC had an abundant amount of pipe, the business thrived and funds were again available for expansion.

**So, in 1951, Eau Claire Plumbing Supply Company was built and opened, mirroring LaCrosse in goods and services. Today, Eau Claire Plumbing Supply occupies the equivalent of two city blocks and serves the Northern area of Western Wisconsin.**

**In 1960, Wisconsin Supply Corporation in Madison joined the growing family. Wisconsin Supply's roots date back to the Civil War, when the business operated as a foundry and manufactured cannon balls for the Union Army. Wisconsin Supply now enjoys the largest facility in the company with 140,000 square feet of offices, warehouse and showroom. The home of Wisconsin Supply is a model for the industry... modern, efficient, in step with the needs of a progressive, growing Madison and able to service a large area of eastern Wisconsin.**

**In 1970, with Gerhard Poehling's background in the heating business, Kewanee Boiler Corporation was purchased. After turning Kewanee's financial problems around, Gary re-sold that business in 1975.**

**Also in 1970, the company headquarters in LaCrosse was built at 106 Cameron Avenue. Expansion over the years has brought LaCrosse Plumbing Supply to it's present total of 90,000 square feet of offices, warehouse, and showroom, plus 3 acres of bargeyard and pipeyard...**

**Since 1897, LaCrosse Plumbing Supply Company had sold goods in and around the nearby community of Rochester, Minnesota... so it was only natural in 1988 when Rochester Supply opened it's doors for business, becoming the fourth midwestern facility, and the first outside of Wisconsin. Located on Rochester's west side, on busy Highway 14, near Highway 52 and Interstate 90, this facility has already undergone a large expansion of it's present location to more than double it's original size, and serves an area of Minnesota from the Twin Cities south...**

1990 was a big expansion year for the growing company, as two new locations opened their doors... the first to open was Rockford Supply Corporation in Rockford Illinois. Rockford Supply had been a well-known heating & cooling supplier in Northern Illinois, family owned and operated as Warm Air Supply. Over it's first two years Rockford Supply made a rapid transition to it's present status as a supplier of plumbing, heating & air conditioning, well supplies and municipal/industrial supplies.

Just months later the doors were opened at Milwaukee Supply Corporation. In it's venture, the company originally tested Milwaukee's waters with an aggressive sales staff and daily deliveries from Madison. Then, in October of 1992, a groundbreaking took place in Milwaukee... and construction was begun on a modern new warehouse/office facility for Milwaukee Supply. Milwaukee has grown with a modern new warehouse/office facility, complete with a beautiful Gerhards showroom.

1993 was barely a month old when another new facility opened it's doors... Minnesota Pump & Supply Corporation opened in Minneapolis, Minnesota, specializing in pump and well supplies and eventually becoming a full line supplier in 1995. Located just off Interstate 494 this strong new Twin Cities facility services contractors throughout Minnesota.

1997 proved to be a significant year for the company. As the celebration got underway in honor of the company's 100th birthday, a new branch in Mankato, Minnesota opened for business. This eighth facility expanded the company deeper into central Minnesota, and anchored the coverage areas in the Eastern, Central and Southern parts of the state. This opening nearly coincided with another tremendous announcement, the acquisition of the W.S. Patterson Company. W.S. Patterson had five solid operations in Wisconsin; Appleton, Green Bay, Wisconsin Rapids, Rhinelander and North Milwaukee. Not only did W.S. Patterson already sell many of the same products as the rest of the company, they were also solidly established as an industrial force in Wisconsin. This industrial expertise has been expanded into all locations.

**The final announcement of 1997 was made in August, as The LaCrosse Plumbing Supply Companies became The First Supply Group. The First Supply name is the corporate umbrella, and each facility maintains it's individual identity.**

**1998 also provided expansion for the company, as Kretschmer-Tredway Company in Dubuque, Iowa was purchased and opened in August as First Supply Dubuque. In 1999, First Supply Owatonna was opened in Owatonna, Minnesota, bringing the total number of facilities to 15.**

**The company now blankets their area of the upper midwest. Contractors in a large area can count on a main channel supplier with key adjacent locations, each with a complete inventory, fast delivery and staffed with industry professionals who know their business.**

**The company utilizes successful new techniques that work, such as an express pick-up system, that allows contractors to pick up their needed material as fast as possible.**

**A fleet of trucks crisscrosses Wisconsin, Western Minnesota, Northern Iowa and Northern Illinois, with daily deliveries to fulfill the company's commitment to it's customers; to provide the products they want, when they need them. Additionally the company develops, and provides timely, aggressive marketing programs. Plus a solid schedule of seminars, schools, dealer meetings and product shows, just one more cog in the full service wheel of customer commitment.**

**Finally, there's Gerhards, the finest kitchen and bath showrooms in the midwest, serving the retail customer, and providing an effective and essential sales tool for contractors by allowing their customers to personally see and select the products they want for their building and remodeling.**

**All facilities utilize the most current new technology available:**

- a computer system that's the envy of the industry with 448 ports for printers and terminals throughout the fifteen facilities of the company...
- fax machines in salesmen's vehicles...
- electronic messaging systems...
- computer-aided designs for bathrooms, kitchens, sprinkler systems, heating & cooling systems...
- instant truck to office communication...
- radio frequency controlled terminals in the warehouse...
- computerized quotation systems...

**First Supply Group, a main channel supplier with an unmatched record for service, locations, quality products, on-hand inventory and delivery time...**

**A main channel supplier who earned the honor of Supply House Times "Wholesaler of the Year" in 1989...**

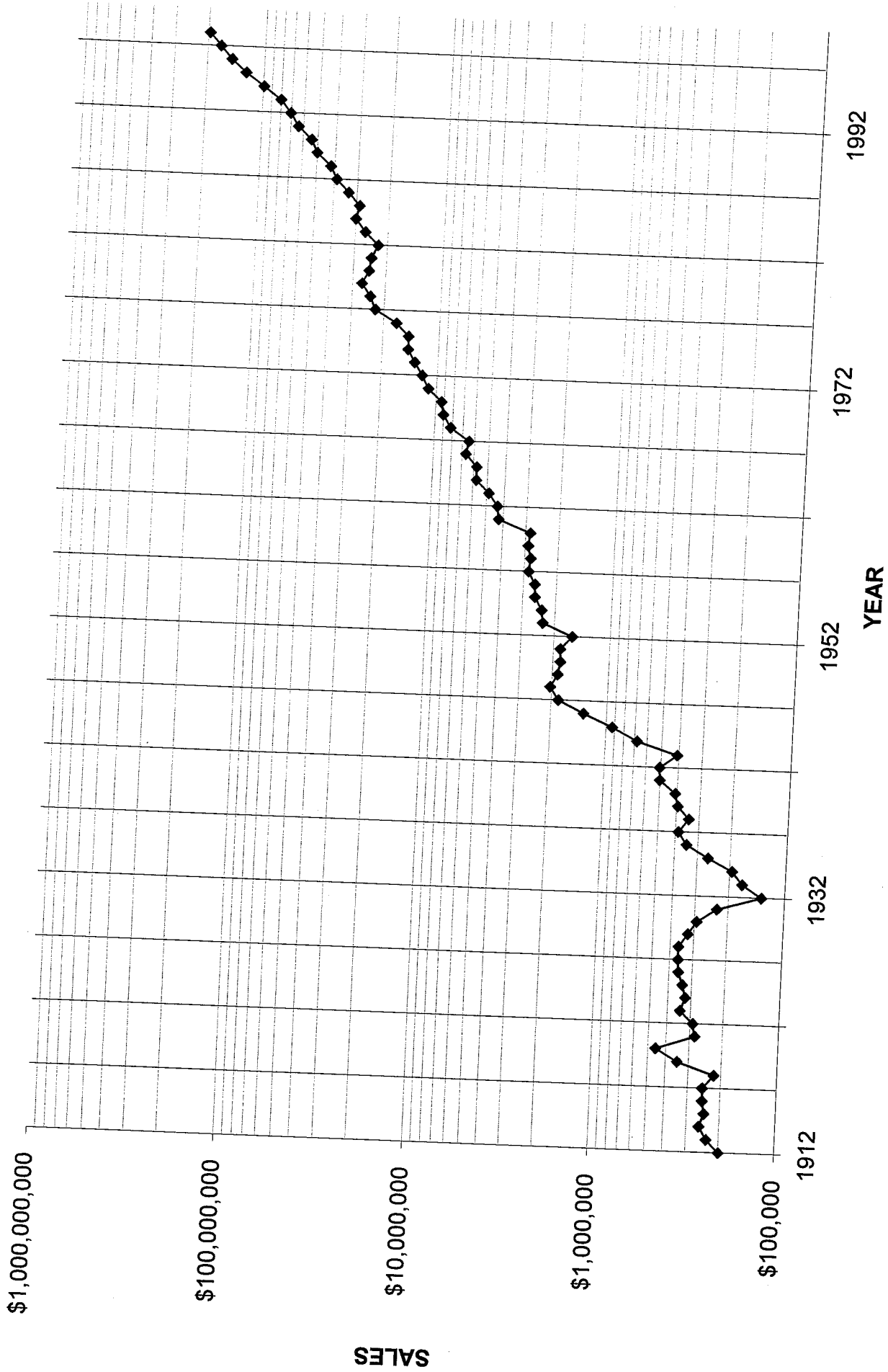
**A main channel supplier whose retail showrooms earned Wholesaler Magazine "Showroom of the Year" honors in 1992...**

**A main channel supplier whose position as a community citizen, whose ethical standards, whose professionalism and technical expertise have established relationships to make them the main channel for contractors in four midwestern states...**

**A supplier who is the main channel leader in each of their markets... making them the primary marketing tool for those superior product-lines most desired by contractors in the upper midwest...**

**To maintain this position of main channel supplier, the people of the First Supply Group, have a commitment unmatched in the industry, and a dedication to getting the job done right the first time and every time.**

# SALES FOR LA CROSSE PLUMBING SUPPLY COS.





**LACROSSE PLUMBING SUPPLY PHOTOS (CAPTIONS)**

**PHOTO # 1**

**A BARGELOAD OF SOIL PIPE ARRIVES AT LACROSSE PLUMBING SUPPLY'S DOCK IN THE EARLY 1970'S.**

**PHOTO # 2**

**ONE OF LACROSSE PLUMBING SUPPLY'S "MODERN" FLEET OF DELIVERY WAGONS FROM ABOUT 1900.**

**PHOTO # 3**

**(FROM "PUSH" MAGAZINE IN 1902 - PAGE 12)  
THE ARTIST RENDERING OF THE ORIGINAL LACROSSE PLUMBING SUPPLY COMPANY CLEARLY SHOWS HOW THE FRONT STREET LOCATION WAS ACCESSIBLE BY RAIL (FREIGHT CARS), WATER (STEAMBOATS AND PADDLEWHEELERS) OR LAND (HORSE DRAWN WAGONS AND EARLY AUTOS).**

**ANY QUESTIONS CALL THE MARKETING DEPARTMENT AT (608) 784-3839.**