

THE WHOLESALE

News of Plumbing • Heating • Cooling • Industrial Piping Distribution



Bradley Corporation, now under the fourth generation of Mullett family ownership, has been known throughout its history for innovative product development. While new product launches are still a key focus, the company is also implementing a variety of tools that facilitate wholesalers' efficiency, accuracy and profitability. Read more about this commercial, institutional and industrial plumbing manufacturer on pages 66-67.

Johnson Controls acquires CAL-AIR

MILWAUKEE - Johnson Controls, Inc., a global leader in facility management and building control, has acquired CAL-AIR, Inc., a leading mechanical and energy



services contractor headquartered in Whittier, Calif. Specific terms of the agreement were not disclosed.

CAL-AIR, incorporated in California in 1953, has grown its technical service capabilities in service, installation and (Turn to Controls supplier... page 27.)

Ferguson acquires appliance distributor

NEWPORT NEWS, VA. — Ferguson has purchased Home Equipment Company, Inc., trading as Cline Contract Sales,



headquartered in Richmond, Va., through a stock transaction completed September 1, 2004.

A distributor of home appliances to the custom builder and remodeling market, Cline Contract Sales has annual sales (Turn to Home Equipment ... page 27.)

To promote Wirsbo PEX brand

Uponor North America streamlines business



APPLE VALLEY, MINN. — In a move designed to focus the company's concentration on the Wirsbo PEX brand, Uponor North America executive vice president Jim Bjork announced in late October that the company will close RTI Piping Systems in the United States and Plasco PEX-b Manufacturing in Canada. Additionally, the Uponor Manufactured Structures and Uponor Ecoflex businesses will be consolidated into Uponor Wirsbo and Uponor Canada.

"The objective of this business initiative, which we plan to finalize in early 2005, is to focus on our leading brand, Wirsbo, and core technology, which is PEX-a tubing,"

said Bjork.

The RTI and Plasco facilities located in Bellport, N.Y., and Langley, British Columbia, will close in the first quarter of 2005. The Manufactured Structures office in Elkhart,

Ind., will relocate to the Uponor Wirsbo headquarters in Apple Valley in early 2005. Uponor is working with employees during this transition by offering outplacement services and (Turn to Wirsbo focus of... page 27.)

V&B expands distribution north of the border

MONROE TWP., N.J. — Building on its strategy to gain a greater share of the North American market for its plumbing and tile products, Villeroy & Boch is looking to Canada to expand its distribution. The company — which earlier this year consolidated the sales and marketing of

its sanitaryware with tile and has been regaining a foothold in the



U.S. market — named Quebec-based Imperial Decorative Hard-

ware — one of Canada's largest distributors of high-end fixtures, furnishings and accessories for the bath — as a partner in this undertaking.

In announcing the association, Marc Nover, general manager of Villeroy & Boch's Bathroom, Kit- (Turn to Villeroy... page 27.)

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Bradley continues to strengthen top commitment to customers

BY MARY JO MARTIN
Chief editor

Bradley Corporation, now under the fourth generation of Mullett family ownership, takes seriously its role of providing value to the wholesale channel. Known throughout its history for innovative product development, Bradley also provides a variety of tools that facilitate wholesalers' efficiency, accuracy and profitability.

Bradley's depth and breadth of product allows wholesalers to be the sole source supplier for customers in the commercial, institutional and industrial washroom market. In 2000, Bradley united its fixtures and accessories divisions to provide greater product access and service to plumbing wholesalers.

"We've brought our entire range of products to the wholesale distribution market," said Steve Zingsheim, vice president of sales. "Wholesalers have traditionally handled our fixtures and now are doing a wonderful job with our accessories. It brings more value to them and allows them to offer more to their customers."

Simplifying specifications

Bradley puts great emphasis on specified product, which helps wholesalers ensure they are providing the correct product to their customers for every application.

"We built our business on making sure our products get specified, are specified correctly for the application and are easy to read," said Zingsheim. "This allows distributors to be very efficient and accurate in putting together their quotations. Because we spend so much

time and money getting specs right in the first place, the end user is happy because they're going to get something that works right for them while the distributor is happy because they're going to have a satisfied customer and the process was simple."

Maintaining the specifications requires constant monitoring and updating. Product manager Nate Kogler described the process that Bradley goes through in getting products specified to meet standards with government agencies and organizations.

"We work very closely with these groups that develop standards," he said. "The process to get a product certified and accepted is quite time-consuming and very intensive. The product has to go through very thorough testing and our factory has to be audited. We have to ship product to them on a regular basis to make sure the certification is maintained. But we feel it is worth it our customers and end users can be assured our products meet those standards."

All specification and standards information is featured on Bradley's website in a concise, easy-to-understand format - a welcome relief for wholesalers who don't have the time or inclination to peruse the reams of information generated by government agencies.

"It is important for us to educate our customers and the public on standards and specs," said Jon Domnisse, director of marketing and product development. "A section of our website is dedicated solely to that area. We provide a very descript, concise account of the certifications our products meet. These short, actionable-type narratives give wholesalers an edge when they're talking

about those products to their customers.

"It really is incumbent on manufacturers like Bradley to take the time and offer the resources to educate all the different customer groups on defining certifications, describing the certifications they have and describing why those certifications are important."

In addition to product and specification information, Bradley's website offers wholesalers the option of web order entry and order tracking. The company also has a dedicated website for its parts business which provides historical data on product and parts - dating back to the company's early years - for those in the repair/maintenance market.

"Our wholesalers love the online tools we have made available," said Domnisse. "It pays off for everyone. We can get the information to our customers faster and they can service their customers more quickly and accurately. The amount of time wholesalers have to make good decisions and follow up on jobs has become so compressed. They

"By having inventory available throughout the country, we are able to respond quickly to customer orders and now wholesalers don't have to assume the cost of carrying excess inventory..."

— Steve Zingsheim

just don't have the time anymore for delays or waiting. Companies like Bradley that have a strong commitment to customer service and supporting the wholesalers are the ones that are their most valued trading partners."

Ongoing product development

Over the past decade, Bradley has increasingly worked with its customers and reps to broaden and intensify its product development program while continuing to offer custom-designed products for specific applications. Bradley's products now go beyond heavy industrial applications to include the light and medium commercial market as well.

Bradley's product offering includes:

- washfountains
- security plumbing fixtures
- multi-station lavatory systems
- emergency drench showers, eye-washes and portable units
- patient care lavatory units
- commercial faucets and showers
- washroom accessories and partitions
- solid plastic locker systems
- thermostatic mixing valves.

According to management, the company continually meets its goal of having its new products account for at least 5% of annual sales.

"We've gotten more entrenched with



From left, Bryan Mullett and Bill Andersen watch as a stainless steel is polished at one of Bradley Corporation's Wisconsin plant.

getting good input from customers and have moved from a job shop to a more overall corporate new product development program that addresses customers' needs," said Domnisse. "There's always going to be place for custom projects, but we get so much feedback from focus groups among our customers and also from our reps that we have placed a greater emphasis on national new product innovation. Wholesalers and Bradley have had a true partnership from Day One. Our wholesaler customers have

made Bradley what it is today."

Various teams across the company make continual product innovation a reality. These teams share best practices with each other to create washroom products that really appeal to customers. The company also relies greatly on its independent representatives - some of whom are second- and third-generation reps - to keep the relationships with wholesalers strong and the lines of communication open.

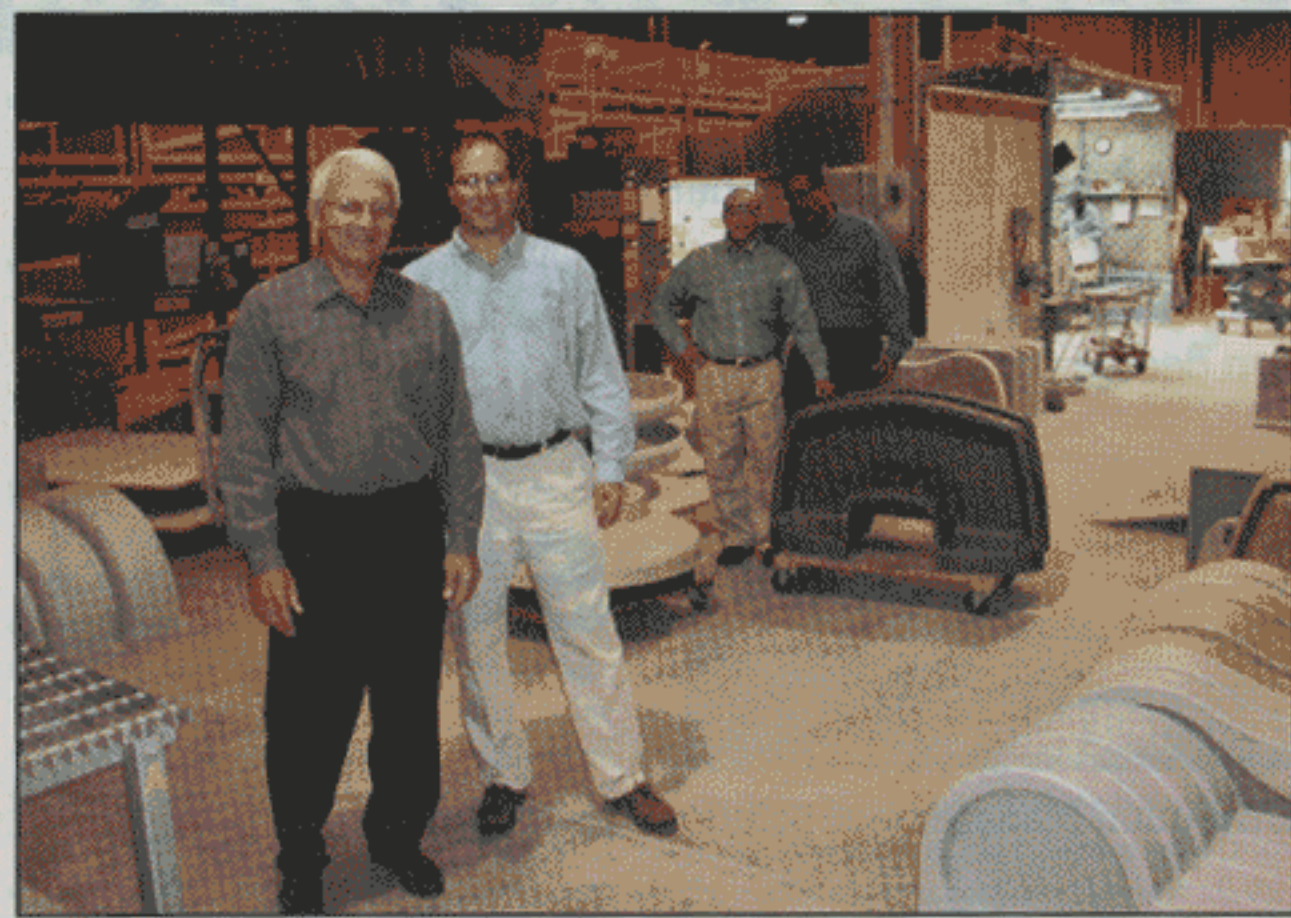
"That combination allows us to get a lot of unbiased objective input and a national perspective," said Domnisse. "There are very regionalized opinions about products and we want to make sure we are offering the right products for all parts of the country."

Continual reinvestment

To keep up with demand and new introductions, Bradley's four production facilities are constantly being upgraded.

"We're always looking at options to improve our manufacturing facilities," said Kogler. "We recently took our solid surface line and reconfigured the equipment and floor layout all the way back to square one. We were able to do some major upgrades that will allow us almost limitless capacity, which will give us fantastic lead times.

"We always want to ensure that our



From left, Bill Andersen, president and COO, Jon Domnisse, director-marketing and product development, Bryan Mullett, director-customer development, and Steve Zingsheim, vice president-sales, at a Bradley Corporation plant.

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facilities are operating efficiently by laying out new floor plans and making traffic flow through the line productively. We've done a lot of analysis to maximize our square footage and have invested in state-of-the-art equipment that is recognized worldwide."

In fact, according to Zingsheim, Bradley reinvests 3% to 5% of its annual revenues into new equipment or more efficient processes.

"We believe strongly in reinvestment in our facilities and equipment," said Zingsheim. "This not only benefits the wholesalers and end users by providing them the highest quality product very efficiently, but it also is done for the sake of our employees. We want to provide a safe, stimulating atmosphere with the best possible tools and technology, which, in turn, breeds loyalty and longevity among our people."

With the intense amount of product development at Bradley, the company instituted a training structure that educates Bradley personnel on both new and redesigned product. Bradley's independent reps also go through a two-part training program that includes both basic and advanced product knowledge.

"We hold product training sessions at least once a month," said Dommissee. "This allows our employees to better service our customers, while giving our

made in Milwaukee and two plants in Ohio manufacture partition washroom stalls and solid plastic lockers.

In addition to its primary central distribution center in Menomonee Falls, Bradley has a 27,000-square-foot distribution center in Southern California, as well as inventory centers in Kansas City, Atlanta, Houston, Toronto and New York. Bradley also keeps parts in stock in every major market, which gives local availability to the most common Bradley replacement parts. All of this has dramatically lowered the company's lead times — from 16 weeks a decade ago to just one week for most products today.

"Wholesalers told us they wanted to reduce their inventories but still needed timely fulfillment for their customers," said Zingsheim. "By having inventory available throughout the country, we are able to respond quickly to customer orders and now wholesalers don't have to assume the cost of carrying excess inventory. We bear the cost of carrying the inventory for same day/next day delivery. It all adds up to responsive, quick turnaround and satisfied customers. Wholesalers know they can rely on Bradley for quality products and on-time delivery. None of our competitors have better lead times."

Beginning this year, all product ship-



From left, Jon Dommissee, Steve Zingsheim and Bryan Mullett check out some of Bradley Corporation's valves.

ley's patient care products. This van visits hospitals, clinics, nursing homes and other institutions so health care practitioners can view the product up close.

Family leadership

Bradley was founded in 1921 by Howard A. Mullett after he bought the rights to the wash fountain from inventor Harry Bradley of the Allen-Bradley Corporation. Mr. Bradley felt it took too long for his workers to be able to get a snack, use the restroom and wash their hands during their breaks. So to save them precious time, he came up with the concept of group handwashing. The product received almost immediate acceptance in the marketplace, and Bradley expanded to serving the entire U.S., Canada and Mexico very rapidly.

Bradley has launched a number of industry firsts, beginning with the wash-fountain that was the basis of the company's founding in 1921. Other notable innovations over the years have been:

- first group shower fixture (1931)
- first column shower (1940)
- first yellow safety colored emergency eyewash/showers (1972)
- solid plastic locker concept (1990)
- Express lavatory system (1993)
- Frequency lavatory system (2003)
- OneStep bottled eyewash (2004).

The Mullett family continues to own and lead Bradley. Howard G. Mullett took the helm in 1953 after his father stepped down. Don H. Mullett became president in 1980 and is now the CEO. He and his wife Barbara have three sons involved in the business — one is in sales, one in manufacturing and the third works part-time while he is enrolled in college.

"One of the reasons we've developed such a close relationship with wholesalers is that the Mullett family has a very similar way of running its business," Dommissee said. "They're hands-on. Don is very involved with the company and he knows the people, products

and customers. The family ownership tries to get their children involved in the business in different areas so they have a well-rounded appreciation for what it takes to run the business.

"Beyond the industry involvement, the Mulletts are very civic-minded. They donated a multi-million-dollar ice hockey arena to a local public high school because they saw the need and knew the community would be able to enjoy it for decades to come."

Trends for the future

Kogler described some of Bradley's most recent product introductions, and again credits the team effort of everyone at Bradley, the company's reps and customers, for being a very important part of the process. According to Kogler, some of the key launches in 2004 have been:

- a multi-height lavatory system idea for adults, children and individuals in wheelchairs;
- a barrier-free line of EFX fixtures that makes it easier for someone who is impaired to use the fixture comfortably;
- a new one-step bottled eye wash product that allows the bottle to be activated without unscrewing a top;
- a battery infrared system with much longer life for sensor-operated control of lav and handwashing systems.

In the future, Kogler said he sees an even greater demand for solid surface products, as well as ADA compliance across the board. In addition, he cited the new look of commercial or industrial products.

"Washroom design has really changed in the last decade and continues to evolve," Kogler said. "Before you either had products that lasted a long time but didn't look good, or vice versa. We're now seeing durability and aesthetics combined. That's a big challenge and Bradley is totally focused on fusing those two aspects together." ■



Bradley Corporation's Bill Andersen and Jon Dommissee try their hand at assembling an Express lavatory system.

reps the knowledge to conduct training courses at distributor operations or large maintenance accounts. It's a very efficient way of doing training that allows wholesalers to have a more personalized approach at their own businesses. We also have many online training guides on our website."

Operational efficiencies

Bradley, headquartered in Menomonee Falls, Wis., employs 542 and has four manufacturing facilities. The fixtures are primarily produced in Menomonee Falls, washroom accessories are

ments are now barcoded, another way in which Bradley has responded to customer needs.

"Many of our customers manage their inventory through barcoding," Zingsheim explained. "Now they can receive our products and track them very efficiently. We always try to look at what is down the road and plan for it in advance so we're ahead of the curve."

One of the ways that Bradley stays in front of its customers is with its fleet of five product display vans that are constantly traveling the country. One of the vans was recently equipped with Brad-