

BYRNE SPECIALTY GASES

flows with Kenworth



From freezing off a wart to putting bubbles in beverages, specialty gases are an often overlooked part of daily life. Until a business runs out of it, that is.

Since 1984, Byrne Specialty Gases has lived up to its motto, "The Reliable Resource," supplying the specialty gas needs of the greater Seattle area.

A true entrepreneur, Dan Byrne started the company with one used truck and a sincere desire to own his own business. He tried the classic approach: Find a need and then fill it. His path turned out to be adding value to the way gas is typically purchased.

In many cases, industrial gas distribution is primarily handled through a channel of independent welding supply houses that may stock specialty gases in addition to the traditional oxygen and acetylene. Byrne, who has an advanced degree in thermodynamics from Stanford, knew there were a lot of high-tech applications for different types of gas.

For example, the "white lab coat" type of buyer may need absolutely pure, high-grade gases in less than a tank car load for use in research. Dermatologists use liquid nitrogen to "burn" off skin blemishes by freezing them, high-tech manufacturing requires certain types of gas for production purposes.

Byrne knew there was a customer base that would also appreciate, and pay a bit more for, such value-added

services as installation, after-sale support, accuracy, cylinder package quality, certification and other extras. Some also need sophisticated gas supply and dispensing systems. In short, his firm provides total solutions to the needs of the high-tech marketplace.

Byrne left his job with a major gas manufacturer and began cold calling from a basement office. Along the way, he pitched pharmaceutical companies, semiconductor manufacturers,



hospitals, research firms and universities.

Primarily serving the smaller, private commercial sector that appreciates the value-added services he provides, Byrne, 45, has grown his firm to 23 employees; Byrne Specialty Gases has annual revenues of \$4 million serving biotechnical, electronics, biomedical device manufacturers (hospital monitoring equipment), soil and water testing, aerospace, advanced laser users, small medical clinics, and microbreweries. Two years ago he opened a satellite office in nearby Portland.

Today the fleet has grown to seven vehicles with the recent addition of several new Kenworth T300 straight trucks. Two single-axle Model T300s with a 20-foot box recently joined the seven-truck fleet; six are cylinder haulers



Brent Fernyhough, Dan Byrne, and "Mac" McElroy view Kenworth T300s as tools to help them excel at customer service.

and one service truck. Both are Kenworth Class 7 straight trucks. They are spec'd with top-of-the-line seats, heated mirrors, extra marker lights, extra backup lights and chrome wheels.

Doesn't hire 'drivers'

According to Byrne, the greatest reward in running a company is not profit nor growth, it's "seeing the people we hire become successful." Part of this is due to his practice of "hiring for their last position with us, not their first."

"Customer service, safety and training — these are the three pillars of the business," Byrne says. "Also, hire people who care. We don't employ truck drivers, we employ customer service representatives who drive a truck as a part of their job. The truck is just a means of getting our customer service accomplished."

"We hire people prepared to take the next step, whatever that may be. We look for people who have college degrees, or proven success in the military, because it shows they have the initiative to stick it out and finish."

"But they all begin by servicing a customer for a period of time, seeing the applications, understanding what the customer needs are, so they will have a broad base of knowledge to draw from. The person doing the deliveries is on the front lines, he's the company as far as the customer is concerned. They become our customer service operatives — drivers second, service persons first." After receiving their CDL, Byrne personnel go through extensive hazardous materials training, even though most materials they deliver are non-flammable and not toxic. They also learn how to service some fairly sophisticated equipment.

"Gas is really only half the business," says General Manager Brent Fernyhough. "The installed, turnkey equipment is the rest. We're


also known for our fast delivery and attention to detail, which is evident in our spotless Kenworth trucks, innovative design and installation, plus 24-hour-a-day service.

"Right now we're medium sized in this market, but we're looking to grow by doing business systematically and with as little guesswork as possible. Our plan is to develop a system and a standard, and then train to that standard."

Outsources service, maintenance

According to Dan Byrne, he expects a lot from his employees and one way to reward them is to put them in a premium truck.

"We don't skimp on equipment, uniforms, supplies, tools or anything; this is why we chose a Kenworth. Also we don't want our employees worrying about equipment breakdowns. Kenworths are reliable and a great tool to help our employees excel."

Byrne indicates that he bought a Kenworth because he got the best advice from his dealer, who he felt was interested in helping him run his business better. "The Kenworth dealer helped us spec the right engine, transmission, differential and tire size, and was helpful in walking us through these variables," Byrne says. "Our trucks are fully loaded almost all of the time. A 150-pound steel cylinder filled with gas weighs nearly that much empty, it's just the pressure that's gone. We're hauling more steel than gas, up and down hills." "When it comes to spec'ing equipment, it's not about price, it's about value, improved efficiencies and relationships. We receive all of this and more from Kenworth. Of course, it also helps to have the sharpest looking, most maneuverable truck on the road." 

Forward thinking

When it comes to truck purchases and maintenance, Byrne Specialty Gases believes in relying on the experts.

According to Mac McElroy, who supervises distribution and warehouse, plus handles dispatching.

"Our customers are forward thinking, loyal and want to concentrate

on what they do best," he says. "We're the same way."

"Often we brainstorm about what could amount to be a problem before it actually becomes one and then go about solving it in a proactive manner. For example, this is why we don't do our own truck maintenance in

house. We prefer to form solid relationships with the people who do things best. Our employee's job is to be out in front of the customer, not be an expert on truck maintenance. And, we want them to have peace of mind.

"Our trucks are much more than service vehicles, they're 'rolling advertisements' on the road. They are a reflection of our commitment to detail and to quality. In an urban area, a truck makes six million visual impressions in a year."



"Mac" McElroy,
Distribution &
Warehouse Supervisor

