

The Commonwealth Quarterly

News from around the circuit.

Winter 2002-03



Commonwealth Electric Company
of the midwest

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In the last Commonwealth quarterly, I mentioned what goes around comes around – it's true. Back when I turned 50, there was another partner of mine that went to great lengths to make sure everyone in the Commonwealth Electric family knew of my aging process. Guess who turns 50 one day after April Fools Day? That's right, the President of Commonwealth Electric.

Well folks, David Firestone has again gone to great lengths – only this time, he is trying to make sure he will be out of town on his birthday and not receive the recognition for turning 50 on April 2, 2003. Fear not, Dave Firestone for I, your partner, will not let the masses go by not knowing your contribution to the aging process.

Attention all Commonwealth employees – come April 2, make sure you call or e-mail our President and COO to congratulate him on obtaining the ripe old age of 50. Dave thinks he will be safe if he's gone. Beware Fireball of the long arm of your partner who will pick a day of celebration that will only be exposed on the day that it happens.

A little background on Dave "Hotrocks" Firestone – Dave graduated from the University of Nebraska with a B.S. in Construction Management. He went to work for Commonwealth Electric in Lincoln, NE as an estimator in 1979. In 1981, he went to Des Moines, IA to become Branch Manager. From 1984 to 1986, he was responsible for the management of contractor contracts throughout the eastern United States and operated out of Indianapolis, IN. In 1986, he was made Area Manager for Lincoln, Omaha and Des Moines.

In 1987, he became one of my partners when we started Commonwealth Electric Company of the Midwest. He was our Senior Vice President in charge of Omaha, Lincoln and Des Moines until April of 2002. Since then, he has taken on the responsibilities of President and Chief Operating Officer.

Dave and I do not always agree. In fact, as the Lincoln office can attest to, we have gotten into many arguments over the operation and course the company is to take. I would not have it any other way. Dave Firestone is extremely ethical and has had one underlying trait the entire time I have been in business with him – that trait is to protect the company first – make sure that all of the employees of this company are treated the way he wants to be treated – fair. This trait is why we have survived so long as a partnership and organization.

So just make sure you wish Dave a Happy "50th" Birthday come April 2.



Happy 50th Dave!
May you have at least 50 more.

Networking Users at Branches Boosts Productivity

Article in The McCormick Letter – October 2002

With more than 500 employees working out of six offices, estimators and project managers at Commonwealth Electric Company of the Midwest can't waste time. That's one reason why this multi-state commercial/industrial contractor shifted to Win 12000 systems from McCormick – enabling it to network its computers in each branch location.

Commonwealth transitioned quickly from the Win 6000 system to the 12000, and it is reaping gains in estimating productivity. "We just did it earlier this year," says Matt Firestone, chief estimator. "Previously, we had a handful of keys at each branch, and the users were sharing them. We didn't have a key for each user. Now, we've eliminated that problem.

"But the big thing is that, over time, everyone had tinkered with the McCormick database. I guess we had, at one time, a lot of different databases – perhaps close to a dozen! We didn't have consistency across the company.

"Now, we have the software networked here at our headquarters (in Lincoln, Neb.), in Omaha, and in Des Moines (Iowa). I'm able to modify the database from my desktop."

Old but New Company

Commonwealth is an "old-line" company in one respect, in that founders Pat Campbell, David Firestone, Glen Moss, and Tom Price hail from a previous company where they had worked. At the company's 1987 start, there were 90 employees.

Despite that older-than-15-years history, the company isn't afraid of new things. Recently, Commonwealth started a voice-data-video (VDV) operation. It has two BICSI-registered communication distribution designers (RCDDs) on staff – one each in Omaha and Lincoln. The VDV operation has 20 technicians and 15 vehicles. David Firestone, Matt's father, is the chairman of NECA's VDV group (as well as serving

as vice president for the association's District 7).

Matt Firestone started working in the company warehouse as a high school student. He began as a project estimator in 1997, the same year the company began a multi-year transition from DOS to Windows with its McCormick software.

"We purchased Windows in 1997, but didn't fully implement it until 2000," he notes. "Everyone was kind of comfortable with DOS. Getting everyone trained on the Windows version took a bit of time – and we wanted to make sure we had it right, and that everyone was just as comfortable with Windows.

"Of course, it's now a lot faster for all of us, and easier to use. Plus, today when we bring someone new into the operation, it's a lot easier to bring them up to speed. Windows is the standard today, and it's easier to teach than DOS."

Commonwealth has at least eight full-time estimators. Additionally, project managers do some estimating at each company location. There are 30 McCormick users in Lincoln, Omaha, and Des Moines – and more than 10 at the company's three Arizona offices (Phoenix, Tucson, and Prescott).

Networking Advantages

Commonwealth's future will see more VDV work and more design-build. The company is now gearing up to take advantage of McCormick's CAD Estimating system. Matt Firestone says it will use more of the features embedded in the software.

"I don't think we're even scratching the surface on everything we can do with it," he says. "One thing we're starting to use more is the graph feature. We weren't in the habit of using it, but it's handy. When I started showing it to our



Bob Philipps, Matt Firestone and Paul Claus

managers, they liked the quick, easy visualization the graphs offer about what comprises a job. They can right away see the dollars instead of just a list of numbers.

"We've also used it with some general contractors and owners to show them specifics about their jobs. Numbers are one thing, but people find it a lot easier to understand information if you show them a bar chart or a pie chart."

At the same time, the company is reaping the advantages of using the Win 12000 system. "We have a tremendous advantage now, with everyone on the same database," he claims. "We ran into problems the old way. If someone modified his database, we couldn't back up a job on one machine and run it on another.

"Now, we can move a job or split up jobs between estimators, and we know we are working with the same information when we compare one job to the next."

As a large, creative company, Commonwealth innovated when it went to the network. Often, a branch manager or vice president will review a bid – on screen. The company wanted managers to see bids but not get into the program and inadvertently make changes.

"With McCormick's help, we created a user called 'Manager'-a 'dummy' user,"

Commonwealth Furthers Its Retail Expertise

Michael Price – Branch Manager, Des Moines, IA

The Bergner's project in Peoria, Illinois consists of the construction of a new 2 story retail anchor store for Bergners, a division of Carson Pirie Scott based in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Bergner's will be one of several anchor retailers of the new "Shoppes at Grand Prairie Mall" in Peoria.

This project broke ground in Spring of 2002 and the store is scheduled to be open in Spring of 2003.



Roy Lamb,
General Foreman

The Peoria project is the largest ground up department store we have done from Des Moines, sized at over 182,000 square feet and consisting of service equipment, power distribution, lighting, emergency generator, phone and data cabling, fiber optic cabling, fire alarm system, sound sys-

Networking continued

Firestone explains. "All we allow someone accessing the systems as 'Manager' to do is get to the bid summary. They can even adjust that, but they can't do anything else.

"When we're reviewing a bid, we can be on the speaker phone, looking at the same numbers – and we don't have to leave our desks. We explained to McCormick what we wanted. They actually called me the next day, and we got it set up.

"That's one of the big reasons we've stayed with McCormick – the support we get on the technical side. If and when we have questions or concerns, they are always there to help us out. I've used other software packages. The support we get from other software providers isn't anything close to what we get from McCormick."



tem and EAS and camera loss prevention systems.

Within the original store design we are also completing several smaller projects for specific retailers including Clinique, Tommy Hilfiger, Polo, Lancôme, Findley and several others. These consist of specialty cosmetic bays and vendor shops located throughout the sales floor area.

Roy Lamb is the Project General Foreman. These type of out of town projects present a unique set of problems but Roy is doing a great job.

"Roy has done a great job with project layout, building relationships with the other contractors on site, and really taking a hands on approach to the project. Roy's involvement has been a real key to our success in Peoria."

- Michael Price, Branch Manager



Roy has established a good working relationship with the local union, suppliers and tradesmen. The project looks to be done on schedule and within budget.

Des Moines Breaks Ground on APC's New Facility

Ron Saf – Project Manager

In the fall of 2002, Commonwealth Des Moines was selected as a project team member for APC's new facility in Ankeny, Iowa. Commonwealth is providing electrical design build services for the 30,000 square foot office complex. The project team consists of Graham Construction, Brooks Borg Skiles Architecture, CEC Civil Engineering Consultants, AirCon Mechanical, and a team of owner's representatives from American Protein Corporation (APC).

APC is a leader in the research and distribution of animal nutrition for swine, calves, and household pets. They serve a worldwide market

Square D power distribution utilizing K rated Transformers, low voltage lighting control, Innovative Technology TVSS protection on the main electrical distribution, complete telephone cabling installation, Ortronics data systems, Simplex fire alarm system, Northern Card access security system, reheat coil power and control wiring for VAV control boxes, energy management system, exterior accent lighting, and pond fountain lighting.

Nate Findlay is the project foreman and Ron Saf is the project manager. Dianna Merritt in the office is adding estimating support for the budgeting process.

Commonwealth Electric is very confident of our work force and office staff to provide the highest level of customer satisfaction for the project team.



“We are very excited about being selected as the electrical member of the project team for the APC building in Ankeny. We are bringing all of our services to the table for this project. Ron and Nate are off to a good start and I am confident we have the right team on the job for the owner.”

— Michael Price, Branch Manager

including Latin America, Asia, and Europe. The new office building in Ankeny, Iowa will be a great addition to the area office park. Development of the property includes future office, research and development buildings.

The project will consist of Peerless linear lighting in the office areas,



Welcome New Employees to the Des Moines Office



(left to right)

Carolyn Cole,
Receptionist

Matt Masters,
Estimator Project Manager

Richard Dull,
Communications Project Manager

Electronic Article Surveillance System

Michael Price – Branch Manager, Des Moines, IA

After spending so much time Christmas shopping the past few months, you may have noticed walking between large floor mounted pedestals at the entrances of your favorite malls and retailers. Well, these are not for crowd control; they are for the store's Electronic Article Surveillance (EAS) system. The pedestals you walk through at the store entrances are sensing for security tags on selected garments and an alarm will sound if the garments are taken out of the store without removing the tags.

Retail store's loss prevention departments often employ the use of EAS systems to decrease the amount of inventory shrinkage in a store due to shop lifting and employee theft. The implementation of these systems has



been very successful for the owner, all but eliminating inventory shrinkage and providing a payback for the system of less than two years.

Commonwealth in Des Moines is planning and scheduling for its 5th year of EAS system installations with Sensormatic, the nation's leading manufacturer of EAS Systems, and Saks Incorporated. This

year we have a total of 14 locations, located across the Midwest from Minot, North Dakota to Coralville, Iowa to Chicago, Illinois. Over the past few years, we have completed over 50 store systems across the Midwest with Sensormatic.

When Commonwealth started, we only installed the electrical "infrastructure" portion of the project including under-floor raceways and dedicated 120V power, which facilitated the equipment installation by Sensormatic's technicians. Our scope



of work has grown into installing the EAS equipment, in addition to installing the infrastructure portion. When we are complete, Sensormatic technicians come in and perform a system start up and check out.

Our foreman last year and for the upcoming 2003 projects is Doyle Horwart. Doyle has done a great job with getting these systems up and running in a tight and demanding schedule. The next time you are at the mall, take a second look; you may be walking past some of his handy work.

They're Up (Finally!) and the System Works Great

Gil Stensrud – Project Manager

My daughter Marie is a cop. As a parent, you pray that all is right with the world because you know that for her services to be required, most likely something bad has happened or is going to happen. Such was the attitude that I had with the Digital Message Board (DMS) project that was recently completed by the Omaha line crew led by Rick Brock who did a super job coordinating this project. The boards are intended to convey information to the public. Almost all of that information is forwarded as a result of something not so good happening.

Recently the first AMBER ALERT was put into motion because a car was stolen...unfortunately a child was asleep in the back seat of that car. The alert was put into effect and as a result of the alert, which uses many means to get the information out to the public including the use of the DMS boards; the child was recovered shortly thereafter. It was great to know that something we did was used to stop something bad.

Thanks Omaha line crew! You did a good job. As for everything being right with the world...let's keep praying.



UNMC Research Facility

Troy Savich – Project Manager

Commonwealth Electric started work on Omaha's UNMC Research Project back in January, 2002, under contract with Hawkins Construction Company. This 8 story facility will house 104 laboratories, special holding rooms, classrooms, offices and a very large auditorium. This facility will be primarily used for animal research by the top researchers from around the United States. The project is moving forward



extremely well with 40 electricians presently on hand. Don Schuette is the on site Project Superintendent and Ed Persinger is the on site Asst. Project

Safety Update

Ruben Bera – Safety Director

Another year has passed. We accomplished many things in 2002. We completed many jobs. We worked many man hours. Drove many miles. Installed miles of pipe and wire. Climbed up and down ladders a hundred times. Hauled tons of material and equipment. Seems like we can drive a scissors lift as easily as we can drive our own car. Each and every task we completed in 2002 can be described best in one word—awareness.

Every time we climbed into the bed of a truck, climbed that ladder, we knew what potential hazards were present. Every time we turned on that switch we knew what could go wrong. Every time we crawled out on ledges, hung over pipe, walked the edge, we knew of the hazards because we were aware.

Awareness is a part of everything we do at home and at work. When we're at home, we know to make sure that the burner is off. We know not to let children play in

Manager. The Foremen are Ted Ziemba, Wayne Kalal, and Bob Pulliam. One of the many interesting qualities of this project is the main power supply. Two 600 Amp 15KV circuits supplied from the University's Central Utility Plant, which is located 2 blocks away. The conductors are routed underground and they finally terminate on site at 3 large 2500KVA transformers. This has been a very interesting, yet challenging project. We are looking forward to the projected completion which is scheduled for November, 2003.

Directly across the street from the Research Facility, Commonwealth Electric is working on another exciting University Project. This is a new six level parking structure that is one of the largest in Nebraska. The 543,000 sq. ft. parking structure will hold approximately 1600 vehicles. Once again, we are under contract with Hawkins Construction Company on this project. Foreman, Bob

streets. We know that a secured home is a safe home. We do so because we are aware of problems and danger that could occur. At work we wear the correct personal protective equipment.

We use the correct testing equipment. We watch out for our fellow worker. Why? Because we are aware. Being aware of situations is one thing. Being able to react is another. We prepare our work with the word awareness in the back of our mind. It is always better to be prepared and avoid a knee jerk reaction. It's best to be proactive rather than reactive.

So how was 2002 from a safety standpoint? What kind of accidents did we occur? Some were minor; some required a trip to the doctor. Some were treated on the job site. Some of you still believe that good old scotch 33 tape is a cure all. Sometimes it actually worked. Lacerations led the group. I asked myself why we had these cuts. No one enjoys hav-



Bohling and a crew of four electricians have been working diligently on this project for the past 10

months. We are expecting the project to finish by the end of February.

These projects are just another example of the fine workmanship our electricians have done and how Commonwealth Electric can take pride in their work knowing that it will serve the community now and in the future.



ing a stitch put through their finger or hand. Were we not aware of the potential hazard before we made that cut? It's hard to say. Maybe we need to be more aware of the hidden dangers of what we do.

As we look towards this new year of 2003, our goal remains the same. Zero accidents. Many say that can't be done in our industry. I don't believe it. Do you? As I've said many times over, not one of us have ever left the house in the morning and told our significant other, "Look for a call later. I'm probably going to be injured at work today".

You know why you don't say that? Because you, a skilled craftsman, a vital member of our family is aware of the dangers we face each day. Your awareness is our key to success. Always remember, an informed electrician is a safe electrician.

Think smart, work safe.