

A Family Legacy Built Over Three Generations

BDS Laundry Systems sees 'loads of success' ahead as family remains focused on its customers

Growing up during the 1950s, David DeMarsh learned the ins and outs of the laundry business first hand. During those early years, his father, Albert, owned a laundry and drycleaning store along Grand Avenue in St. Paul. It was during these formative years that David, working closely with his father, learned how hard work, integrity and a commitment to building personal and mutually profitable relationships with loyal customers would keep the company strong and growing through good and bad times.

"Bert" DeMarsh was a dedicated husband and father with a penchant for entrepreneurship. He devoted long hours to building the business into an enterprise that would provide for his family. With a successful retail operation already established, Bert sensed there was an even greater opportunity for him to explore.

In 1961, he and a partner founded Business Development Sales (known today as BDS Laundry Systems) in the basement of his home. Bert knew the country was on the cusp of a huge expansion, and that literally thousands of men and women shared the dream of

owning businesses of their own. BDS introduced many of them to the concept of owning self-service laundries. The rest, as they say, is history.

"What stands out most about my father was his devotion to educating others on how to make money in the laundry business," David recalls. "To him it was about much more than just selling a wide-eyed investor some equipment and cashing the commission check. He always took a personal interest in helping customers operate successful stores."

The Early Years

While vended laundry equipment had been around since the 1930s, in various forms, it wasn't until the 1950s that coin laundries started popping up in big cities and small towns across the Midwest and the rest of country. It was during this time that the first fully automatic washers began rolling off assembly lines by the millions. These revolutionary machines rapidly changed the way Americans completed the labor-intensive laundry chore with a new, more modern and efficient way of handling the family's laundry needs.

The Maytag Company began manufacturing automatic washers and dryers affixed with factory-installed coin meters in 1958. Seeing the potential, Bert contacted Maytag officials and quickly signed on to become the exclusive Maytag distributor serving the Twin Cities and surrounding states.

A natural salesman at heart, Bert excelled at convincing people from all walks of life to get started in the laundry business. He took great pride in selling "the complete package" which included everything from initial store design to lighting, signage and



An early 1960s Highlander Laundry Center featuring Maytag coin-operated equipment.

promotional materials, as well as all equipment necessary.

BDS soon entered the route market, serving apartment buildings across the city. The company would install coin-operated equipment in a central laundry room for residents and split the revenue with property owners. Soon the DeMarsh name became synonymous with quality service and fair dealings.

David joined the company full-time in 1969. Over the ensuing years the company grew at a rapid pace. But by the mid-1970s, with inflation raging and the country in recession, and the market for self-service laundry equipment contracting, Bert told his son he should perhaps look around and find a different line of work.

"Dad was uncharacteristically discouraged, and he wanted to protect me, but I felt strongly that the hard times in the 1970s would one day come to an end, which would unleash a tremendous opportunity for growth once the country got back on its feet," David recalled.

Together, he and his father buckled down and worked to nurture the business. By 1979, David had become a part-owner of the company and was responsible for day-to-day operations. In 1984, David had established the business as a Midwest powerhouse and bought out his dad's remaining shares



Albert DeMarsh (right) and Maytag officials sign the distributorship agreement in 1961.

and became the sole owner. He later rebranded the company as BDS Laundry Systems.

Growing With the Times

Today, BDS Laundry Systems is the largest commercial laundry distributor in the Upper Midwest, and has earned a reputation for being one of the most respected operators in the industry. David credits the organization's continuing success to its loyal employees, many of whom have over 20 years of service with BDS.

The BDS sales and management staff has over 200 years of combined experience, while the service/parts team has 380 years of combined experience. It is through this unprecedented level of expertise that BDS continues to successfully serve a growing customer base. The company currently employs 48 full-time professionals.

BDS serves four distinct markets across its eight-state Midwest territory: Vended Laundry, Multi-Housing Laundry/Route, Dealer Network and On-Premises Laundry. In addition to equipment sales, factory-trained technicians provide on-going equipment service and maintenance. BDS also operates a successful nationwide parts business.

BDS Laundry Systems is among an elite group as one of the longest-standing Maytag Commercial Laundry distributors still in operation today. In addition to Maytag and Whirlpool brand equipment for vended laundries and apartment buildings, the company also distributes UniMac brand industrial equipment for on-premises markets such as hotels/motels, hospitals, nursing homes, athletic facilities and more.

In 2011, BDS Laundry Systems joined forces with Laundrylux when it was named the exclusive authorized distributor of Electrolux Professional and Wascomat Commercial brand laundry equipment, greatly expanding the breadth of the company's technologically advanced product offerings.

Also, in 2011, BDS celebrated its 50th Anniversary and completed a major remodeling project at its St. Paul, Minnesota headquarters complex. The 29,000-square-foot



In 2011, BDS Laundry Systems completed a major renovation of its 29,000-square-foot Mendota Heights, Minn., headquarters facility. The office and warehouse received a total makeover to accommodate growth and to better serve customers.



The DeMarsh family with the famous Maytag Repairman.

office and warehouse facility underwent a total makeover to accommodate growth and to better serve its customers.

While much has changed since the company's beginnings on Grand Avenue in St. Paul, one thing remains the same: a deep-seated commitment to providing quality products, expert advice and superior service.

Looking toward the future, David DeMarsh sees even more potential. "We are just scratching the surface of what is possible in this business," he declared. "With new advancements in technology and a growing emphasis on energy efficiency, BDS is well positioned to take advantage of emerging opportunities in the years to come."

Readying BDS for a New Generation

David is quick to point out the importance of the love and support of his wife, Peggy, and his two daughters as critical to his success during his tenure as the second generation business owner. "Peggy, Erica and Danielle have stood by me through it all. They've helped us maintain and grow our close-knit family business over the years."

His daughters are now involved in day-to-day management of the company. Erica DeMarsh-Ginkel joined in 2002 after graduating from the University of Colorado. She currently serves as Vice President of Managed Laundry Operations. Danielle DeMarsh joined in 2005 after graduating from the University of Central Florida and is Vice President of Commercial & Contract Sales.

A Recognized Leader

In 2001, David was honored by the Coin Laundry Association (CLA) with its coveted Founders Award, the industry's highest award recognizing the contributions of one individual to the commercial laundry industry. In 2010, the Minnesota-native was recognized as one of "50 Who Made a Difference" by the CLA. He is a past President of the CLA Board, a director of the CLA's Insurance Board, and President of the National Multi-Housing Association of Route Operators (MLA) Board. He is also active in other local, state and national laundry associations.