





MOVING FORWARD





Written by Paul Hutchings

For Emond Plumbing & Heating, Inc., moving forward is a way of life. The Taunton, Massachusetts-based plumbing and heating company has been a high-quality plumbing, heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC), and sheet metal construction contractor for over three decades, and is not planning on quitting any time soon.

Improvement in all facets of business is not just a goal but a way of life, says Christopher Anthony, Chief Operations Officer, and getting better is something everyone in the company stands behind.

"Mr. Emond coined a phrase around here: 'Someday we'll be a real company,'" he said. "I personally hope we don't because my fear is, if we do, we'll stop trying, and the goal here is to always get better."

Emond mainly serves projects in Rhode Island, Southern New Hampshire, Eastern Connecticut, and its home state of Massachusetts with licensed tradespeople throughout those areas. The majority of the company's work—about seventy-five percent—involves plumbing, and the rest is HVAC. It even created its own sheet metal construction department, which allows its clients to have one subcontractor for three major trades.

It all started with Don Emond Jr., who Anthony calls the 'American Dream.' When Emond started the company, he did not know anyone in the plumbing industry, Anthony says, but he liked to work with his hands, so he learned about plumbing. He was a guy in a truck, doing small jobs to get by, according to the company history. Now his company employs over 150 people in four states, and Anthony couldn't be prouder.

"This all starts with [Don Emond Jr.], and he really cares about his employees. You hear the phrase 'give him the shirt off his back,' but I've actually watched that happen," said Anthony. "This is a family company, and even though it's gotten larger over the years, we treat everyone like family here, and if anyone needs help, I have yet to hear Don say no to anyone. He really cares."

That caring was on display at the beginning of the pandemic last year. Anthony said the company kept going, kept the jobs going that it could, and kept communicating with employees, remaining honest and open. Some were scared and wanted to take a couple of weeks off, so they got that with pay. Others wanted to continue working, so they showed up every day, for which they were paid a little extra. Some even wanted to be laid off.

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"People had different emotions, and we had to deal with it almost on a person-by-person basis and work through it with them," said Anthony. "But it was really about working independently with each person and working through their concerns and trying to accommodate their needs. A lot were surprised that we would pay them even though they weren't working, but we thought it was the right move at the time, in the interest of giving everyone a little bit of comfort at an awkward time."

Today the company is "pretty much," back to normal, and now dealing with the aftereffects. You may have heard about lumber prices going up and affecting contractors who need lumber. Although Emond doesn't use much wood, it does use PVC piping, the price of which has risen by over forty-five percent. It is a concern that if that kind of price increase continues, the client may stop projects, Anthony says. Generally, Emond Plumbing & Heating might buy a million linear feet per year, and a price jump like the one that Emond material buyers have had to contend with is worrisome, to say the least. No one, Anthony added, is making any predictions about when those prices will go down.

But there is a silver lining. Jobs that were bid and slated to started last summer but were postponed due to the pandemic

are now, for the most part, ready to go. When you have that enormous demand on people and products, factories that shut down do not have the inventory and are now trying to increase productivity, Anthony says. So Emond has begun to catch up, and that means business with many projects in the pipeline. ►

"It all started with Don Emond, who COO Christopher Anthony calls the 'American Dream.'"





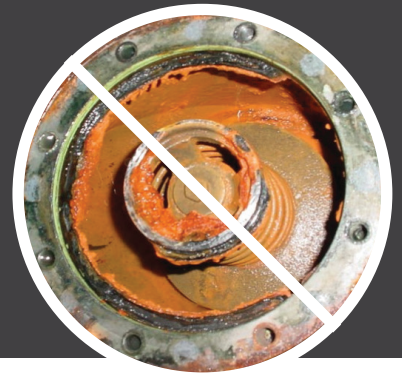
► It is also impressive to look at some of its past jobs. Anthony says he is most proud of a residential complex called Cirrus Apartments in Ashland, Massachusetts. With almost four hundred units and a clubhouse, the size was challenging enough, but its construction schedule took workers over a couple of difficult winters. Working conditions were frozen in winter and muddy in spring and fall, but Anthony expressed his pride, saying that anyone seeing it now would be very impressed.

Other projects of which he and the company are proud include The Key, a 280-unit residential complex in Franklin, Massachusetts and a 270-unit complex in Framingham, Massachusetts. Emond has a certain criterion in project selection according to Anthony.

“We look for the size of projects, how many units in a building, and geographic location – that one is big because, if we can, we like to minimize our employee travel time,” he said. “Also,

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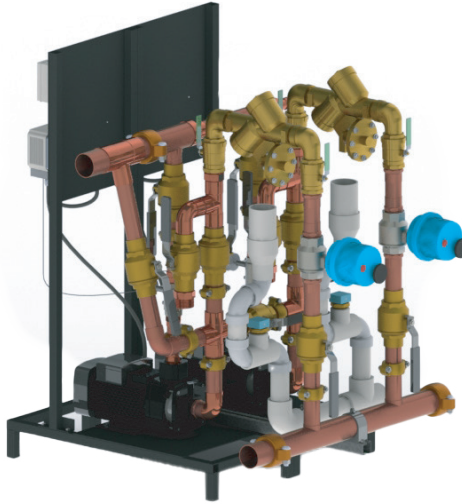
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client relationships are very important and Emond believes in open and honest communication to alleviate any concerns for any partner involved with the project."

The company mainly focuses on residential properties, which include multi-unit apartment complexes, assisted living facilities, and fifty-five-and-older communities. It also likes to work with contractors and companies that turn old mills and factories into living areas, and Anthony seems to have a particular liking for updating old manufacturing sites, professing a love of helping turn something old into something new.

"We've been very successful in bringing in students to help them learn a trade."

"We manufacture exposed ductwork in our sheet metal facility (for these projects), and they make for some very unique and interesting buildings," he said. "It's nice to change a little bit of the history of those old mills that might be abandoned."

He is proud that Emond helps to turn those old buildings into communities with gyms or basketball courts or outdoor living areas with resort-type features. Emond has even done this kind of project for itself. It bought an old facility in its ►





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- ▶ hometown and created a new 20,000-square-foot fabrication plant along with approximately 10,000 square feet of office and training space.

Of course, like any trade-based business, Emond is not immune to the current labor shortage being experienced across multiple areas of business. One of the company's solutions was to utilize the co-op program in which six to twelve students are brought in per year to explore working in the trades at its fabrication shop or helping with plumbing or HVAC installation. In that path alone, Emond has added six to ten people per year in the last few years, and Anthony considers it mutually beneficial for both the students and the company.

"We've been very successful in bringing in students to help them learn a trade and to work in a trade – it helps us with staffing and it helps them with an alternative to going to college and taking out student loans to do so," he says "We've found that to be successful, we have a very good HR department that helps us tremendously to find good people all around, but it's a challenge, it's a full-time job finding the right people."

The company also addresses industry-wide labor shortages by treating people fairly and taking care of them along the way. The company offers incentive plans and shared benefits. When the company does well, Anthony says he wants employees to do well.





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That includes training. Emond takes its training programs very seriously, and constantly works to keep everyone safety trained and keep them abreast of the latest technology. That Anthony calls a challenge, but it is one the company always rises to meet.

The people of Emond are what Anthony is most proud of. "We have a phenomenal team from the office and project management to our foremen and younger apprentices. We just have great people who truly want to do the best work they can," he said.

The future is looking bright. Emond has work to carry it forward into 2023. It will continue, Anthony said, by inviting new ideas from employees and by firmly believing that everyone wants to be better and wants to work towards improvement.

Maybe Emond Plumbing is a real company after all. ■

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