



A UNIQUE LINE OF WORK THAT PUTS PEOPLE FIRST

Resin Systems' president Tom Thomas stands in his fabrication facility in Sulphur, La.

TOM THOMAS, PRESIDENT AT RESIN SYSTEMS, SHARES THE IMPORTANCE OF CARING FOR WORKERS LIKE FAMILY

Working with your hands can be beneficial in many ways. Those that have decided to work with their hands as a career have found a home at Resin Systems, Inc., an industrial fiberglass manufacturer, and fabricator of large-scale custom pipes, ducts, tanks, and other specialty items in Sulphur, Louisiana. Tom Thomas, President of Resin Systems, Inc., shares with us how his

family company has been able to grow from a five-person shop to a business with 50 employees over the past 37 years.

Tom's father, Joe Thomas, retired from the U.S. Air Force and got a job as a mechanical engineer at Firestone's industrial plant. One day, some guys came out to service the fiberglass products at Firestone and Joe hit it off with them. When that

fiberglass company started growing, one of those guys asked Joe to come on as a general manager. He had no experience in that industry, but that's not uncommon in the field. It's the type of industry where you get trained on the job. Eventually, Joe started his own fiberglass company, Resin Systems, with two business partners. Over time, he bought out his partners and it became a family-owned business.

Before college, and in the summers between semesters, Tom spent a lot of time working at the shop, building things, and cutting his teeth on the finer points of the business. Eventually, he was promoted to a shop supervisor and then transitioned into the office as an AutoCAD drafter, estimator, and project manager. "I've had my hands in every aspect of the business," Tom said. While working at the shop, he received a degree in business and also earned his MBA. "I've always had an entrepreneurial spirit and knew I wanted to run a company one day," he said. "After college, I was already so heavily involved in the company, it was a natural transition for me." When Thomas became president, his father Joe became the chairman. "He still comes in regularly to offer his experience to our new hires."

As president of the company, Tom starts his day meeting with the shop supervisor and field supervisor to double-check that they are adequately manned and equipped for the project of the day. Then he walks through the shop, checking every area to see how things are going and if there's anything that needs correcting before the employees begin working. After that, it's emails and management for each on-going project. "There's always something to do in terms of making sure everything is up-to-date and checking on our team; whether it be briefing them on the task of the day or checking on their well-being to perform the task," Thomas said. "Because each product is custom made, it's crucial the team stays focused from start to finish." He ends his day with one last walk through of the shop.

With a workforce of well over 200 years of combined work experience, Tom says they are most proud of their ability to stay safe on the job. "For such a labor-intensive industry, we have an extremely low experience modifier," Tom said. An e-mod reflects a company's workers' comp accident history as compared to others within the same industry and state. This rating serves two purposes: It estimates the premium needed to cover potential claims; and acts as an incentive for safety programs. Tom owes his impressive safety record

to his rigorous safety protocols and the culture his father instilled: If you treat every team member like a family member, you'll take care of each other.

"We've become very close to him. He prays with us, performs weddings for us, visits us in the hospital when someone is sick, and attends funerals when a family member has died."

— Tom Thomas speaking about their workplace chaplain

When a worker is more than just an employee, you begin to realize problems in the shop are often a direct result of personal issues. The mental and personal well-being of employees can have an enormous impact on work productivity and most importantly safety. Knowing this, Tom retained the services of Corporate Chaplains of America that provides the company with a dedicated workplace chaplain. "Tom Bruce visits us once a week and meets with the workers," Tom said. "We've become very close to him. He prays with us, performs weddings for us, visits us in the hospital when someone is sick, and attends funerals when a family member has died. He is a valued member of the Resin Systems team, and his positive impact on everyone's performance and morale is very clear."



Tom Thomas stands in front of an 8' diameter FRP Tank.



Resin Systems' workplace chaplain Tom Bruce, president Tom Thomas, and founder/chairman Joe Thomas in their fabrication facility.



Workplace chaplain Tom Bruce meets with Resin Systems' employee Thomas Cockerill.



This positive impact also allows Resin Systems to collect an annual dividend reward from their workers' compensation carrier, LUBA Workers' Comp. Resin Systems was one of the first policies written at LUBA. "We've partnered with LUBA since the beginning, and because of our long-standing relationship and low e-mod score, we've been rewarded with a dividend every year," Tom said. Additionally, LUBA has helped Tom work through a few fraudulent claims by examining every detail. "LUBA is great about taking care of what they're supposed to be taking care of. We trust them to do that for us, and they've helped us on many occasions."

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Tom adds that they've always treated their suppliers and vendors with exceptional value; after all, that's how the company began in the first place. "We're not going to beat you up on price if we can get the service we're asking for. LUBA has always been very competitive cost-wise, but they've also been outstanding on the service end, so we remain loyal to them just like we would hope our customers are loyal to us." Resin Systems owes their success to just doing the right thing and treating people well because when workers are happy, they're productive.

When asked about the future of the industry, Tom said "We're in the corrosion market, and it's a tough business to be in. There aren't a lot of people who are interested in working with their hands anymore." This issue means the company has had to be more strategic with their processes moving forward. "We've been challenged to continually improve and innovate our processes and procedures to produce the same high-quality products while the labor pool continues to decline."

Because the fiberglass industry is such a niche and custom job, automation will never replace the business entirely; however, they've been able to purchase equipment and fusion machines that can do a few specific manual parts of

the process, like cut fiberglass. The silver lining, Tom adds, is "Because of the lack of interest in doing this line of work, we've seen a lot of suppliers decrease while the demand for the products continues to increase. We've seen six or seven other companies, in our area alone, start and go out of business or leave the area."

Tom also took time to reflect on how the company has impacted him. "Working with my father and seeing his concern for me as a son, I was always grateful that he provided me with a career that was fulfilling while also supporting my wife and four children," Tom said. "I was always able to leave my work family to spend time with my home family. It's been a blessing to have that purposeful balance."

He also mentions that he and his wife have six quasi daughters, meaning in all ways a daughter except biologically or legally. "Whether it's a girl we've met in a children's home in Honduras, who now lives with us while she works on her college education, or friends of our kids, or students we have met in our church youth group—we've unofficially adopted them," Tom said. "When it's all said and done, our investment in others—our families, employees, vendors, and customers—will have a multifaceted and meaningful impact that no amount of money can buy." 🌱