

AIRING ITS business

*Filter specialists
carve lucrative
niche in Austin
industrial market*

FRANCISCO VARA-ORTA | STAFF WRITER

Advanced Filtration Systems started 13 years ago with one man, founder James Mock, seeing an opportunity to start his own business after a few years of selling air filters for others.

Mock's entrepreneurial vision involved identifying and demonstrating expertise in a line of work that most overlook — marketing new, highly efficient air filters in demand by industries increasingly concerned about indoor air quality.

Nowadays, Mock's air filter sales and installation business has 20 people, with hiring under way for three new staffers. The company doubled its headquarters' real estate last month to 20,000 square feet in Northwest Austin.

The company has consistently grown 15 percent each year, and its revenue should be in the \$7.5 million range in three to five years, Mock said. He plans to open a facility, like his headquarters in Austin, in San Antonio and is looking for office-warehouse space of about 10,000 square feet.

AFS sells, installs and maintains air and water filters used on heating, ventilation and air conditioning units for commercial businesses. It specifically targets schools, food distributors, hospitals and high-tech companies where clean air is a top priority. HEB and Samsung are among its customers.

AFS is the exclusive distributor in Central Texas of Camfil Farr, a Sweden-based manufacturer of specialized filters. The filters guarantee energy savings, improved air quality, waste reduction and reduced annual filtration cost.

"We're probably one of the only companies out there trying to sell less. ... We only do that because these filters, while more expensive, save you in replacing them and labor costs," Mock said.

Ray Warren, who manages the heating and air conditioning systems for Leander Independent School District, has been a repeat customer for three years.

"We were changing our 2-inch filters every 60 days, but now have them on a 180-day replacement schedule," Warren

said. "This is saving us on labor as well as overall filter cost because we usually need 200 to 300 per school every time we replace them."

Such results could help attract business as many school districts and educational institutions search every budget item for ways to reduce costs.

And with more commercial buildings in Austin pushing for LEED certification, Mock hopes to capitalize, saying fewer filter replacements will help reduce waste going to landfills.

Family ties

Mock had a business partner early on but bought him out in 2003. Later, Mock's wife, Andrea, joined the company and the entrepreneurial experience. After starting at AFS as accounts payable and human resources manager, Andrea Mock now owns a spin-off branch named Advanced Filtration Products, which leases space from AFS. The spin-off business primarily sells custom-sized or bulk filter media that AFS doesn't carry. This product line offers a lower-cost solution geared toward environments where filters need to be changed frequently.

AFS' filters span eight product lines. It also sells HVAC belts, coil cleaners, ultraviolet disinfection systems and preventive maintenance products. AFS also sells services including air filter service, air conditioning cleaning and refurbishment, and indoor air quality consulting.

James Mock said that because his company sells a product that people don't know in detail, he finds it's important to also sell his expertise. AFS likes to bring in prospective buyers for customized 30- to 90-minute orientations in a simulated classroom to demonstrate their filter options.

"An important part of our job is to educate our customers on the differences in the effectiveness of product," Mock said. "It takes expertise to configure and implement air filtration systems that do the job well, and hard work to ensure these systems continually perform at their maximum capabilities. After being 18 years in this, you know that clean air doesn't just happen."



SARAH KERVER

James Mock, founder of Advanced Filtration Systems, said it's important for his company to demonstrate expertise to customers.