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# Setting the "Barr"

Arkansas Vinyl Door and Window Manufacturer  
Continues to Invest Despite the Downturn

by Samantha Carpenter

From left to right: Linda Case, a 12 plus-year employee, and Betty Weindel, a 6 plus-year employee, push glass into the Intercept oven.

People may have told Harry G. Barr he was crazy to start a building products company in 1934. The company was in the midst of a Great Depression. Sound familiar? But now, 75 years later, the Harry G. Barr Co. is enjoying success.

Today, Barr's son, Larry, president, and his grandsons, Michael, vice president of operations, and Mark, vice president of sales, run the company.

And, despite the down economy, the Barrs continue to uphold the family enterprising spirit. They recently invested in a new software package to make the company run more efficiently. And they continue to scope out new business and new markets for their current products.

The company has done a bit of everything related to building products over the years, including installation, paint, Youngstown cabinets, distributing Chrysler Air Temp heating and air units, and manufacturing aluminum screens and

screen doors and storm windows.

"In 1959, we were doing some knockdown (KD) replacement window work," explains Larry Barr, president of the company. "Then we moved into the new construction side making single-glazed windows. We stayed with that until we moved out here [on Zero Street] in 1972. In 1984, we started into vinyl windows, and by 1989, we started into new construction vinyl windows. In that time frame we migrated out of the aluminum window business."

The company's facility in Southeast Ft. Smith (the industrial section of town) is 65,000 square feet and employs 90 people who produce 20 units of vinyl doors and 1,000 to 1,200 windows per week. The company gets some vinyl extrusions from Deceuninck, but its primary supplier is Chelsea Building Products. The company's glass supplier is Guardian.

Asked how many shifts the company runs, Michael Barr, who serves

as vice president of operations, laughs slightly, and answers, "Just one. The schedule says five days, and really in the scheme of the market now, we've done really well. November was a four-day week every week, but up until that point, we only had a couple [of four-day weeks]. And then in December, we've had two four-day weeks. We could call it a four-day schedule now, but I'm hoping to keep five days until Christmas, and then we'll see what happens in January."

## Focusing on Value-Added Options

While the company is running shorter work weeks due to fewer orders, one way company officials are trying to hook more customers and increase their workflow is by talking to customers about their products' certifications and value-added features, like their insulating glass certification, which Michael says they have been doing for many years.

"We've been doing the push for IG certification for a long time. That's one thing that I'm really proud of is our insulating glass. I'd put our insulating glass up against anybody's, and we've done the CBA testing for 20 or 30 years," he says.

The company has opted not to certify its products by the American Architectural Manufacturers Association (AAMA) or the Window and Door Manufacturers Association.

"When we were in metal and primed windows, we were AAMA-certified then," says Michael. "With the vinyl windows, we've primarily relied on the extruder's testing at the AAMA level. We do all of our glass testing with the National Fenestration Rating Council and we have some ENERGY STAR®-certified products."

To manufacture its single-hung, double-hung, casement and architectural-shaped windows, as well as the side-hinged and sliding doors, the company sells under the Weather-barr brand, a variety of machinery is used.

"We have a glass cutter. We also have an Intercept® line to produce most of our IGs," says Michael. "We do some Super Spacers® for specials. Most of our plant equipment is Sampson or GED."

The company says choosing a particular machine usually starts with a need.

Michael says that two or three years ago, they were having some problems cleaning the welds on glass for the units.

"We knew we wanted to get rid of the manual cleaning because it's dangerous and it causes repetitive stress and it was something we needed to get rid of—not to mention a consistent process helps the product also," he says.

So he and others went to GlassBuild America in Las Vegas. "We knew we liked GED's equipment and we bought a PC 4000 Frame Cleaner got an Intercept line and we've virtually had no prob-

lems with it."

While the company officials went and talked to several people, they say they naturally gravitated to GED because of their existing relationship with the company.

"We do have other people's equipment, but in new decisions, we've always looked at the track record we have with a supplier. In new decisions, performance says everything," Michael explains.

"Their [GED's] Internet service and telephone service have been excellent; their response time is great. We don't have any spare equipment, so if a line goes down we need help right away," Larry says.

Michael says that he knows some equipment manufacturers have started charging for their tech support service.

"Nothing is more frustrating than having to pay for something when machines are down and you are already losing money. GED hasn't

done that yet. The tech support that we've gotten over the phone has been real good—whether we are dealing with a PC problem on the Intercept line or a controller problem on one of the cleaners," he explains.

While the company has invested money in its manufacturing equipment in the last four years, the company currently is investing money in software by converting from proprietary manufacturing software to Friedman Frontier ERP.

"It's got everything and, with its dealer solution, it should do a lot for us, especially smoothing out our buying process," Michael Barr says. "Putting that in our customers' hands and our salesmen's hands will get questions answered and eliminate product problems."

The company also uses Win IG software in its manufacturing process.

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Chris Haddick cuts vinyl single-hung frames.