

# Still cutting edge

By Cara Connelly Pimental

In 1934, John J. Burns, his wife, and then teenaged son started a saw shop on Rodman Street in Fall River. Burns traveled on a bit of a journey before taking a leap of faith to start his own company. He learned the art of the saw sharpening business in Nova Scotia and gained much of his experience in watermills.

The elder, first generation Burns worked in a number of sawmills from Northern Maine to Portsmouth, R.I. It was at the Weyerhaeuser Timber Company in Portsmouth where Burns perfected his craft, "absorbing the technicalities of the saw business," according to Burns' son, Marshall. It's also where the second generation Burns found his passion for the craft. The family business was then known as Burns Saw and Machinery Company.

Business in the 1930s and 40s brought a different type of customer though the doors of Burns Saw and Machinery Company. Large mill companies, hand saws, big blades, home shops, local businesses and factories were the typical customer. Business thrived and for fifty years remained at the Rodman Street location.

The growing company saw expansion not only in bigger sales and more customers, but another generation of Burns at the helm. Marshall Burns' two sons, John "Spike" Burns and Jeff Burns became and integral part of the company and moved to a

bigger location.

The elder Burns always listened to his sons and gradually gave them more decision making authority.

"I gave my sons responsibility and held back on giving them authority until they proved themselves. They have proven themselves and I am very proud of my family," he said.

Marshall Burns listened to his sons when they suggested altering the direction of the company. They thought getting into power tool sales and service was a good idea. Today, most of the company sales come from power tool and machinery sales and service. The rest from manufacturing carbide-tipped circular saws and from Burns' sharpening service.

"As long as both my sons agreed on it, it was OK with me," says Marshall Burns. He knew it was time for some changes and over 25 years ago the company became known as Burns Power Tools.

"I don't always appreciate the value of what they

want to do but, I respect their decisions," he says.

Changes like installing computers to track inventory and shipping was a change that was necessary and better suited for his sons to accomplish. The elder Burns would prefer to use a piece of scrap paper or a piece of lumber.

Currently, Burns Power Tools now employs the second, third and fourth generation of Burns' men.

Marshall Burns is very proud of his sons and grandsons—and makes an okay, thumbs-up gesture.

Zachary Burns, great grandson to the Burns founder, credits much of the growth to the company's diversity—showroom sales, outside sales, sharpening services & repair services.

"We have a successful inside sales team and outside sales force," says the fourth generation Burns. The inside sales consist of hobbyists, woodworkers and contractors. Outside sales include large millwork companies, job/construction sites, woodworking/cabinet shops and web sales.

Despite the current economy, business is still good, reports Zach Burns. Burns recently expanded their showroom and manages to keep 19 employees on staff.

The 1,000 square feet of former office space now houses the Rockler partner store and products. Rockler is an industry leader and considered to be the largest woodworking catalog. "Now customers



The Burns Boys: Marshall, Zachary and John



can come and get everything but the lumber here," according to Zach Burns.

Over the last 75 years, Burns Power Tools has become much more than a saw shop. Burns is regarded as a major supplier to the construction and woodworking industries. Burns specializes in industrial power tools and heavy duty machinery. They provide tool sharpening and repairs.

Burns caters to contractors and woodworkers and values their customers. Burns is proud of their "total package" approach to power tool marketing. According to Zach Burns, "the tools and supplies we choose to stock are considered the most efficient on the market." Their marketing system is simple—provide quality tools and accessories, and the repair and sharpening services to go along with them.

Burns is a factory authorized service center for DeWalt, Porter Cable, Milwaukee, Hitachi, Makita, Bosch, Metabo, SawStop, Delta, Powermatic and Jet Power tools. "Our sales staff boasts 15-25 years experience. We have highly qualified people able to make quality recommendations based on their knowledge and experience," said Zach Burns.

Specialized blades require specialized care, and this is where Marshall's expertise has been passed down to his other grandson, Russell Bodington, who runs the company's sharpening department. It takes expertise to maintain the quality, finish, and long-lasting nature of specialized saw blades. For this Burns offers the "SuperSharp Finish," a premium blade sharpening process that last long, cuts better and saves wear and tear which extends the life of any tool. Zach Burns reports web sales and service has increased over the years.

"Finding quality companies to maintain blades is difficult in some rural areas. We have a customer from Montana that send in 25 blades at a time for servicing." Additionally, sales orders come from as far away as California, Hawaii, Puerto Rico and Canada.

In 1995, Marshall Burns was inducted into the Tools of the Trade magazine hall of fame. He still comes to work every morning.

Recently, Marshall, who will be 90 this year, was notified about a distinguished award. He will be honored at this year's JLC LIVE residential construction show, the recipient of the first ever lifetime achievement award by Tools of the Trade. Hanley Wood, publishing company for the Journal of Light Construction and Tools of the Trade, is bestowing the honor on the elder Mr. Burns. The JLC LIVE show will be held at the Rhode Island Convention Center March 18-21.

*Burns Power Tools is open Monday-Friday 7am-5pm and Saturday 8am-noon. They are located at 350 Mariano Bishop Boulevard; Fall River; 508-675-0381 [www.BurnsTools.com](http://www.BurnsTools.com)*

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