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## Fall River co. builds on energy efficient products

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Courtesy Photo Fall River-based Munro Electric: designed and supplied this solar system of 518 solar panels, a 95kW inverter, and support racks for the parking garage at TradeCenter 128 in Woburn. The 3' x 5' solar panels were installed by Cummings Properties.

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March 27, 2009 4:30 PM

FALL RIVER, Mass. — With branches in Cranston, R.I., New Bedford, Brockton, and Raynham, headquarters in scenic Fall River, and Conservation Group branches in San Diego, Calif. and Albany, N.Y., it's hard to not see a multi-level success story when looking at Munro Electric.

Established 67 years ago by Alexander Munro, who began selling products from his car to electrical contractors, Munro Distributing Co. was created to provide the most technically advanced electrical products and cost effective alternatives to the industry as possible and, according to Marketing Manager Keith Durand, the years since then have not changed that motto.

Still family-owned and operated, Alexander's grandsons Scott, Brian, Dean and Kevin continue the family legacy of providing those same quality products, while continuing to stay on top of today's and tomorrow's technology.

We asked Durand if he wouldn't mind sharing some trade secrets of the business, providing a backstage view to what works for the company and how they've been able to sustain success in a competitive industry.

"Our business has been 60 years in the making and we can service all of North America so it will be pretty tough to duplicate," said Durand.

A recent serious focus for Munro has been its interest in alternate energy sources, an industry, Durand said, that is no longer just a whim for a few, but an idea that is here to stay. It's an area that has been highly successful for the company which has supplied product for many large scale projects including, locally, energy efficient lamps and controls for a facility upgrade for the University of Rhode Island; energy efficient lights, switchgear and a low cost electrical supply chain for FM Global's new \$60 million headquarters in Johnston, R.I.; and solar panels, racking system and invertors for one of the biggest solar systems in Massachusetts, a 98kW system with more than 500 panels on the parking garage at Trade 128 in Woburn.

But with more and more innovations in energy efficiency hitting the market, Durand is even more excited about what's next for the company.

"It's just so brand new," he said about the industry. "It's an open market."

And, he added, since Munro already has relationships with many of the companies and contractors working in the industry, it is primed to take advantage of the increased interest in energy efficiency.

To that end, the company stays on top of what new, useful products are hitting the market.

"We are soon going to offer a prismatic lens for four foot fluorescent fixtures that are soy based and there's going to be a worldwide market for them," Durand said. "It was an idea that came from one guy in his garage who developed it but we can sell thousands."

Durand would like to see even more start-ups created to tackle the market of alternative energy sources.

"Manufacture aluminum racking systems or panels for solar arrays, build wind turbine masts or home wind systems," he suggested. "We build sailboats that are known as the best throughout the world, why not be the world standard in renewable energy or energy efficient products?"

Stressing the need to promote local businesses, Durand said many of the solar products that Munro sells are made by Massachusetts companies like Lightolier and Sylvania.

"Our vendors, such as Watt Stopper, GE lighting, and Sylvania are churning out the most cutting-edge energy saving products on a weekly basis. Lighting accounts for almost 40 percent of a facility's total energy costs so new LED streetlights, sound activated light switches, dimmable CFLs lamps, wafer thin solar panels and fluorescent lamp ballasts can save thousands of dollars a year in energy bills," he said. "It's good for business and the environment."

With more than 100 employees and growing, Durand said another secret to Munro's longevity is the relationships they have forged.

"We have decades old relationships with our customers and we provide the best customer service and lowest prices that keep them coming back," said Durand. "We have numerous golf outings, NASCAR trips, as well as prizes and other giveaways that the box stores will never have."

While meeting the independent electrician supply needs has always been their core business, Durand said larger divisions like Munro's energy conservation group and its solar division are exploding.

"We were there for our contractors through the housing and commercial booms but as everyone one knows those can't last. Since we have the perfect storm of technology and government/state polices, the time has finally come for renewable energy and energy efficient lighting products," said Durand. "These are not short term markets but the beginning of a new era where if you are not energy efficient or LEED certified you will not last."

When it comes to energy efficiency, Munro doesn't just sell products; they put their money where their mouths are. If you are looking for cutting-edge energy-efficient products and you pay a visit to a Munro site, you won't have far to go to see these products in action.

They may be right above your head or, in some cases, even on the roof.

"Since we sell and integrate solar systems for commercial customers we wanted to lead by example and have installed a solar system on our main office and distribution center in Fall River," said Durand. "A solar array for our Brockton location will be completed by the spring."

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