

# INDOOR COMFORT

April 2011

THE VOICE OF THE INDUSTRY  
NEWS

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THE WEST'S LEADING MONTHLY NEWSMAGAZINE FOR THE AIR CONDITIONING, HEATING, REFRIGERATION, SHEET METAL AND VENTILATING INDUSTRIES

## Anniversary

### General Heating & Air Conditioning Celebrates 30 Years of HVAC Contracting

By Peter Landau, Editor,  
Indoor Comfort News

Phillip Grosenbach was only three years old when his father, Roy, started the San Gabriel Valley, Calif.-based heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) contracting firm General Heating & Air Conditioning in 1981. His first memories date back to when his parents worked out of their home. "The garage was the shop area," he said. "The trucks were in the driveway. I was always helping my dad wash the trucks at the end of the day."

Roy Grosenbach worked his way up from an install and service technician at other HVAC firms, to sales and management before deciding to venture off on his own. "Working for somebody else would only take him so far," Grosenbach said about his father. "He had his own vision that he wanted to pursue." After several years working out of his house, Grosenbach bought the site of their current location in 1985, at 1310 S. Myrtle Ave., Monrovia, Calif., and the company has been there ever since.

General started with only two trucks and now runs over a dozen. Currently, they employ 18 but have been up to 25 when there is demand. General is a North American Technician Excellence (NATE) C-3 Contractor.

Phillip Grosenbach learned the trade through working school vacations and summers with his father. "Throughout junior and high school I never had a normal summer," he said. "I was either out in the field or the yard with the guys. I was the gofer, the grunt." He started working at General full time in 1995, running a crew as lead installer. In 1999, there was an opening in estimating and sales and Grosenbach took it. "I haven't been in the truck since," he said.

Roy Grosenbach passed away in 2002. Roy Grosenbach's wife, Corinne Grosenbach, had been running the administrative side of the business and took the position of president. Phillip Grosenbach became vice-president and worked the technical side. Corinne Grosenbach is looking to retire over the short-term, at which point Phillip Grosenbach will take a more managerial position with the company. "We have another estimator employed right now," Grosenbach said. "In a normal economy, we could easily have three guys out there estimating and keep them all loaded with leads."

The economy has been a test for General. "We've had to trim off the fat," Grosenbach said. "We've concentrated on servicing our customers, keeping them happy. My mom handles the financial aspects of the business to keep a strong working capital even in a down economy. When other companies were pulling out their advertising to save money, for the last two years we've been taking out more advertising to show that our company's strong. You can't stop advertising

without people asking questions. So, we've taken advantage of the poor economy as an opportunity to gain market share."

Grosenbach is cautiously optimistic about the financial future. "In January, I had eight sets of plans come in from two general contractors," he said. "We don't do a lot of new construction work, we're mostly residential, so that means people realize that they're staying in their homes and they want to put their money into those houses." The main thrust

of General's business, according to Grosenbach, is growing its maintenance, service agreements and working its existing clientele. "Hopefully, we'll have a hot summer," he said.

Part of the reason for General's 30 years as a successful HVAC contracting firm is its commitment to quality installation, service and maintenance. General pulls permits and is in compliance with state energy standards, but being honest has hurt them when bidding for jobs. "The last week of December, I had four existing clients," he said. "I included the HERS testing and permits as I usually do in my bid. I lost all four jobs because other companies were cutting corners."

Without enforcement, which Grosenbach says is sorely lacking, the playing field isn't level and it becomes extremely difficult for a contractor trying to do the right thing to remain competitive. "I have to be able to sleep at night," Grosenbach said, when asked why follow laws that aren't policed. "You have to take pride in your work. I want the referrals. I'm looking to establish real, lasting relationships, not just selling a box. If you want to continue to grow your company and stick around for another 30 years you've got to do the right thing."

Grosenbach suggested a solution to the enforcement issue would be making the C-20 license requirements more stringent to filter only the competent and dedicated into the industry. "You never hear stories about the established contractors," he said. "It's always the guys that are new to the industry or handymen that just add heating and air conditioning to their services without really knowing the science behind it."



Phillip Grosenbach, Monrovia, Calif.-based General Heating & Air Conditioning, Inc.

Being a part of the industry, taking responsibility for uplifting the trade, is why General Heating & Air Conditioning are long-time members of the Institute of Heating and Air Conditioning Industries, Inc. (IHACI). Phillip Grosenbach remembers as a boy going to IHACI's annual trade show in Pasadena with his father. Now he sits on the IHACI board of directors.

"I'm on my third year as a board member," he said. "It's an eye-opening experience. I never realized what IHACI does behind the scenes. You get the newsletter, you go to the trade show, which keeps you up-to-date, but there's so much more. I don't know if it's always been this intense, but the time the executive board members spend lobbying for the trade in Sacramento, or with the California Energy Commission, is just amazing. You have to keep in mind that these are people who are volunteers, who run their own business, but want to give back to the industry and do so selflessly."

Grosenbach thinks HVAC contracting is a great business. "You meet different homeowners and businesses," he said. "You replace an old, inefficient, poorly installed unit with a properly sized one and you get nothing but gratitude from the client, who's comfortable and is paying less for their monthly utility bill. It's a good feeling. If you do quality work you're helping yourself, your employees, your clients and the environment. If every contractor would dedicate themselves to quality work then we wouldn't be bogged down with permit compliance and enforcement but could focus on making the state's goals for zero net energy realistic and achievable."