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SERVING SOUTHWEST MISSOURI

The Clean Water Brigade



Bert Brower owns Ozark International Inc., parent company of Water Technology of the Ozarks, Missouri Valley Environmental and Lakeland Laboratories, three water purification companies based in Nixa.



Nathaniel Smith, a junior research scientist at Jordan Valley Innovation Center, fills a lab bottle with water filtered by Missouri Valley Environmental's system.

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Ozark International and its subsidiaries fight to purify water sources for three decades

by Chris Wrinkle · cwrinkle@sbj.net

What's in your water?

If it's chlorine, bacteria or sulfur, Nixa-based Ozark International Inc. is going after it.

The company operates Water Technology of the Ozarks, Lakeland Laboratories and Missouri Valley Environmental, as well as three private water companies.

Ozark International and Water Technology of the Ozarks each started in 1980, focusing on water softening and purifying methods, owner and founder Bert Brower says. As the company grew, the need to diversify became apparent, and two divisions with supplemental services were added – water analysis by Lakeland in 1988 and industrial purification by Missouri Valley in 1994.

"We found the need to have the other segments of our business more specialized," Brower says.

Water Technology of the Ozarks

Brower started Water Technology of the Ozarks by drawing on his 15 years of industrial water treatment experience with Dow Chemical Co., Drew Chemical Corp. and Betz Laboratories.

WTO provides water products and services to the residential and commercial market as well as operational services for public water and wastewater systems. The systems include water conditioning systems, reverse osmosis drinking water systems, whole-house filters, purifiers that use ultraviolet rays and rainwater harvesting systems.

Because WTO's business is concentrated in the residential market, it ebbs and flows with housing development.

"The housing market is not real good at this time," Brower says. "It's a good thing we're diversified."

The upside to WTO's products for consumers is that softeners remove calcium that can harm clothing, spot surfaces and reduce efficiency of pipes, heaters and other fixtures. Also, with water softeners installed, gas water heaters use 29 percent less energy and electric water heaters use 21 percent less energy, according to the Water Quality Association, a Lisle, Ill.-based group that advocates for water softening equipment, of which WTO is a member.

Lakeland Laboratories

The next piece of the diversification puzzle for Ozark International emerged in 1988 with Lakeland Laboratories.

Lakeland supports the other two companies with laboratory services and also

provides analytical services for 24 southwest Missouri communities' wastewater plants.

Brower estimates that smaller cities' plants are tested monthly and larger cities' plants are tested as much as weekly.

Many of the smaller communities have lagoons to hold their wastewater.

"The wastewater discharge from any type of treatment facility has to be tested," Brower says. "The results of these tests are submitted to (Missouri Department of Natural Resources). In order to make a good recommendation, you need to have a good water analysis."

Brower adds that in smaller towns, the person in charge of wastewater treatment might also wear other hats. "Rather than have that and to buy the apparatus to collect samples, they hire us," Brower says.

Lakeland tests wastewater for coliform and fecal coliform bacteria, nitrates and nitrites, iron and hydrogen sulfide, pH and organics, pesticides and inorganic contaminants. The company outsources testing for ammonia, oil and grease, says lab Director John Derrhammer.

Sarcoxie, a Jasper County town of 1,500 that relies on Lakeland to test its wastewater monthly, has contracted with the company for at least 13 years, says Jeremy Lawyer, city superintendent. Sarcoxie pays Lakeland \$75 to \$100 for four tests a month to meet state standards.

"It's well worth our time to have them do it," Lawyer says. "We don't have a lab, period."

Missouri Valley Environmental

The final company formed under the Ozark

International diversity umbrella was added in 1994. Missouri Valley Environmental markets high-tech water treatment products and services to industrial clients such as Jordan Valley Innovation Center, EFCO in Monett and Detroit Tool in Lebanon, Brower says.

At JVIC, 524 N. Boonville Ave., MVE installed a three-step system that produces laboratory-grade water for use in its labs, says Mark Heiskell, MVE service manager.

The first step extracts chlorine from the water, which is then sent through a reverse osmosis system and, finally, an electrodeionization, or EDI, process that removes minerals in water without chemically destroying organic matter.

"It's a nonchemical process," Brower adds.

The water circulates throughout the building on a loop system, Heiskell says, drawing a comparison to a hospital's hot-water system. "Spigots are located throughout the building, and the recirculation loop runs constantly," he says.

Lakeland Laboratories' Clients

Lakeland Laboratories tests wastewater for these 24 clients, mostly small towns, in southwest Missouri: Adrian, Appleton City, Archie, Asbury, Ballard, Bronaugh, Calhoun, Cleveland, Creighton, Fair Play, Freeman, Garden City, Indian Hills, Leeton, Liberal, Mindenmines, Montrose, Northeast Vernon County, Rockville, Sarcoxie, Seligman, Sherwood, South Greenfield and Urich.

Ozark International Inc.

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Web: www.watertechozk.com
Services/Products: Water treatment, wastewater testing for small towns and water system equipment
2010 Revenue: \$1.5 million
Employees: 10