

# Powell Valves: Celebrating over 170 years of innovation

*Since its foundation in 1846, The Wm Powell Company (Powell Valves) has stood at the forefront of innovation from pioneering technology in the industrial valve market, providing valves to NASA and being Thomas Edison's valve of choice to being a leader in fugitive emission technology. The company has a rich history of achievements that have resulted in their continued success over the past 170 years. Valve World spoke to Executive Vice President David B. "Brandy" Cowart and Senior Vice President Sales & Marketing Timothy Fries at their headquarters in Cincinnati, Ohio to learn about the company's evolution and growth, the importance of proactivity and their investment in new products and combating fugitive emissions.*

By Sarah Bradley

Having endured civil and world wars, dedicating our production for the US military, rebuilding after great floods, surviving the Great Depression and helping to put men on the moon, Powell Valves has proven their ability to evolve and react to customer needs and the changing world market. By providing best-in-class products in design features and quality, at competitive prices with excellent

service, on-time deliveries and flexibility, Powell has continued to maintain its thriving position in the valve world. "We have integrity in everything we do. We want to do the right thing first, not try to fix it later. We may be a smaller company, but with big company resources, opportunities, possibilities and capabilities. It allows us to be nimble and

take advantage of the opportunities that are presented," Brandy Cowart explained. "Being proactive versus reactive is huge. If you are too entrenched in, then you are forced to be reactive. By being flexible, nimble and quick, we are able to get ahead in meeting our customers' needs." Flexibility and speed in reacting to their customer and industry needs; attributes

which have served them well in the past, still apply today and will continue in the future. As a privately-held, family owned corporation, Powell is able to continue to build on its legacy of innovation and family-style company culture.

## Company culture

"Customer First, Positive Energy, Teamwork, Performance, Adaptability & Flexibility and Integrity are our cornerstones of our company culture. As a family-owned business we greatly value our employees and through them we are able to extend our family environment to our customers. It has been like that for a long time - my father, Randy Cowart, is only the ninth CEO & President of the company. Nine presidents in 170 years is pretty unique - we have competitors who have had that many presidents in the last several years. That stability, integrity and family environment throughout the company



means that our employees take a lot of pride in their work and the needs of the customer," said Brandy. "Everybody here is an entrepreneur from engineering to sales to management. Every job responsibility we perform daily touches a customer. That belief and culture is evident from the CEO all the way throughout the organization. At Powell everybody sees the importance of that in the organization," said Tim Fries. "We are a conservative company, but we have the ability to take risks, because we are financially strong. We have great leadership in this organization. They enable you execute on plans and strategic objectives in order to service the customer and grow our market share. We are a very flat management team without egos; it is all about focusing on taking care of the customer. That is what makes this culture so strong and I think it is what has made us sustainable for 170 years." As a cornerstone of the company's achievements, the family culture will continue to be a driving force in their success. As the Wm Powell Company continues to thrive in its second century in business, the community of team members that take pride in their work and stand behind the Powell name will continue to grow with the brand. In the last couple of years, our biggest focus has been on the development and

growth of our own people. Powell is a 170-year-old multi-generational company and we are transitioning into the next generation of leadership, which is an exciting time. We have some extremely smart, young talented people coming through the organization who are being mentored and trained by some of the best in the valve industry that is the focus of our investment. We target and attract individuals with an entrepreneurial spirit and drive, if they have these qualities then we can teach you Powell valves," said Tim. One of the ways that Powell has been utilizing their strong company culture and employee commitment is through their recent investments in further defining their project management groups and encouraging greater involvement from staff at all levels.

Tim explained: "We have invested heavily into the project management side of our offering and we have put a lot of tools in place focused on proactive communication, all the way through the entire capital project supply chain. Our goal was to make that project management process more transparent from the manufacturing, distributor, EPC and even including the end user. Our Proactive Order Management and Milestone Reporting deliver real-time accurate information that assist with keeping a capital projects on time and on budget.







When a capital project reaches a certain scale we assign an executive sponsor, this executive sponsor role at Powell is to be a resource for the project management team to leverage to remove any contingencies that may surface during a large project. We have received very positive feedback from our customers on our approach."

"The broadening of responsibilities in our sales teams and project teams are geared at customer service and driven by the customer. Powell is able to facilitate not only our customer's daily valve needs but also provide the value added needs for their capital project expenditures. Our structure and flexibility allows us to service daily and project needs quickly and completely. Our investment in our people, product quality and management systems are all driven to the customer's needs," Brandy added.

### First in fugitive emissions

Powell's rich history brings unparalleled knowledge and experience. As a pioneer in the industry, the Wm Powell Company has always focused heavily on innovation and being a company of "firsts".

"Powell was one of the first to really jump out there and not only be committed to the control of fugitive emissions, but to also commit to it financially and actually get the products through the individual product testing. There are a lot of folks in the industry that say "me too!" But we always want to be there first and we jumped in there very early with our partnership with Chesterton for packing to make sure we were providing our customers with the best options, before they knew it was necessary," said Brandy. "Investing in fugitive emission technology has been important to Powell. Our head

of engineering was on the committee that helped write the standard and by bringing that information back and a knowledge of the evolution of where it was going in the industry, we were able to really invest in developing our technology early on. We were the first in the industry to get testing done and have inventory of finished goods on the shelf. It has been a significant investment for us and it is all about helping our customers mitigate through the new regulation by having product that exceeds the new API624 standard sooner than later," said Tim.

Over the past several years, despite the issues many have encountered with the economic downturn, Powell's diversity has been the key to continued growth. Powell has recognized the importance of diversification, not only in the products they develop, but in the markets, industries and customer bases they serve.

"I think having a diverse customer base has been one of the big success points of the company. Through the years there have been horrible economic cycles in one industry or another - be it oil, power, chemical or paper. Very rarely are all of those industries on the downward slope economically at the same time. Having a



diverse customer base in so many different industries has allowed us to maintain consistent growth," revealed Brandy. "A lot of our products are standard and can be tailored for all industries because we have immense engineering support behind it. I think that product diversity, the engineering capabilities and the diversity in our customer base is a big foundation for our success as compared to competitors who focus on one industry - they live and die by the success of that industry."

### Completing the package through new product introductions

July of 2017 will mark another milestone in Powell's NextGen Engineering Technology strategy by launching a complete quarter-turn ball valve offering of 1 piece, 2 piece, three piece and flanged with size ranges from 1/2" through to 12 inclusive of Fire Safe.

"Powell's long term strategy is to continue to layer on products that assist our channel partners at completing the package not only for their day to day MRO customers but for the large capital project," Fries adds. "Future products of quarter-turn automation, resilient seated butterfly valves an cryogenic ball valves will follow shortly behind. We are leveraging 170 years of valve innovation and quality to position Powell and Powell Channel Partners for success with valve end user community."

### Commitment to clean room capabilities

Recognizing the changing needs of the industry, Powell Valves has always made strides to ensure that they listen to their customers' needs, look for the upcoming voids in the industry and develop ways to proactively fulfill the requirements before their customers even realize the need is there. Acknowledging the growth in the

industrial gas and LNG markets, Powell has recently made significant investments in cryogenic clean room and testing facilities. "We continue to invest in our manufacturing, testing and machining equipment. Building cryogenic clean rooms at both of our forge steel and cast steel, large and small bore plants in Wenzhou and Yangcheng City, China, was an important investment for our customers," said Brandy. "We have established cryogenic clean rooms in our facilities in China that have been audited and approved. It is something we are able to provide that many of our competitors are not. There is a huge growth in the industrial gases market and we want to be able to properly serve them. Many of the major players in industrial gases have their new construction taking place in China and being there and being able to facilitate that growth allows Powell to be an industry leader." "They are state-of-the-art facilities that supplement what we already have in the United States from a cryogenic cleaning perspective. We now have three global cryogenic clean rooms. We have developed many relationships in the industrial gas sector and they are looking for us to do more for them. There a lot of changes in that industry as far as metallurgy and cleaning requirements and the changing needs of our customers really drove that investment," said Tim.

In addition to manufacturing and modification facilities, Powell continues to maintain a large inventory around the world to ensure that their products are readily available wherever their customers are. "We pride ourselves on being flexible, having speed in delivery and reaction times, but that doesn't mean that we always shoot from the hip. We are very conservative and we want to make the right decision, but once we



The new plant in Yongcheng, China.

make that decision - it is a hundred miles an hour - we are all in. We stand by the belief that you need to choose your suppliers and your customers well, and then be all in," Brandy said.

"We look for channel partners that have a defined strategy. We like to see a good channel infrastructure and we look for competitive brands. We don't want to be secondary or even tertiary to anybody. We want to be primary and we have been fortunate to have developed a great distribution network that partner with us to bring the product closer and help us to be a resource for the customer. We have many long term distributor relationships that have been in place for many decades," said Tim. "A lot of our customers are using global fabricators now, so having facilities worldwide gets our products closer to the fabricators. We can clean and ship products directly to them which compresses our supply chain."

### Global presence

Having that global presence is another way that the company has continued to remain competitive and successful in an industry that is fast-paced with urgent needs to be met worldwide. Powell has continued to invest in growing their reach around the world by establishing manufacturing centers in China to support sales through-out Asia and better service the Middle East. Recognizing the importance of a global infrastructure in



support of their business, Powell has also signed exclusive distribution partnership agreements to support global markets around the world.

By establishing a bricks-and-mortar facility in Houston, Texas in 2014, Powell has positioned itself in the center of the valve industry in order to further support same-day emergency services for its customers and provide another contact point for its clients.

"The Houston and Gulf Coast market is really the hotbed of the valve industry. Rather than having our product a day away, we wanted it to be 15 minutes away. We established that facility in Stafford and stocked it up with inventory to really focus on just being more at-hand to our customers out there. That was one of those customer first decisions - listening to our customers and what their needs were. They are going to run into materials that they need this afternoon, today, now and we are in a position to satisfy their needs," expressed Brandy.

That commitment to better serving the customer and striving to be the best solutions-provider for their clients has been a driving factor in all the developments, investments and efforts Powell has made over its lengthy existence.

"Just saying the customer comes first may sound cliché, but really that is the focus of everything that we are doing. Taking risks and making investments is all driving to provide a better service, a better cost base and better quality for the customer- meeting the needs that are out there, that we have picked up on by listening to the customer. We want to be the customer's favorite place to call - I want them to call us first," revealed Brandy. "You think about how simple that philosophy is in our daily lives - I want to go to this store or that store over another because of the service, the company integrity and the personal service they provide to you as an individual customer. That is the kind of attitude and company that we want to be. Being a private company allows us to do that without getting clogged by some corporate initiatives. We come in every day looking for an opportunity to better service our customers and focus on providing something that helps our clients."