

# RARITAN GROUP CELEBRATES 75 YEARS OVER 4 GENERATIONS... AND IS ONLY GETTING STARTED!

BY: BILL RICHARDSON, JR., RARITAN GROUP

**M**uch has changed over the span of 75 years from when Raritan Supply was formed in 1943 by Harry A. Richardson Sr. From a plumbing and heating supply house located initially in New Brunswick, NJ, to present day facilities in Edison, NJ and Gloucester City, NJ. The vision of Harry Richardson from the outset was to help support his mechanical contracting firm as well as take advantage of the inevitable business boom expected in central New Jersey in the post WWII era. Seventy Five years later with the stewardship of his son Bill Richardson, Sr., his company would undergo several transformations, becoming one of the largest pipe, valve and fitting wholesalers in the tri-state area.

Raritan Supply (now Raritan Group), consists of three divisions; Raritan Pipe & Supply, Raritan Valve & Automation and R3 Machine. A family owned and operated business, Raritan now includes its fourth generation, with several great-grandchildren having joined the firm.

## 2nd GENERATION: INDUSTRIAL TRANSFORMATION

In 1958, Bill Richardson, Sr. (son of Harry) joined the company as a graduate of Notre Dame and having served in U.S. Navy on the U.S.S. Forrestal as a supply officer, Bill soon began to transform Raritan Supply into an industrial pipe, valve and fitting



*Pictured left to right are Tom, Jim, Bill, Jr. and Bill Richardson, Sr. at the Gloucester City Branch.*



*RVA technicians commission 60" gate valve*

wholesaler. New Jersey had become one of the largest chemical and pharmaceutical producers in the country and like his father, Bill saw opportunity in the process industries. The company grew largely by bringing engineered products to market. In the 1960's, Raritan was one of the first distributors to introduce ball valves and thermoplastic piping, eventually adding thermoset (FRP) and lined steel piping and valves to their standard product mix. Valve automation also became a service to complement several of the valve lines.

In 1968, Raritan installed an IBM 360/20 computer and IMPACT inventory control system. This system enabled Raritan's promotion of "Systems Contracting" and integrated supply management system, with customers from New York to Maryland. From 1943 through the early 1980s, industrial sales in the tri-state region was an expanding and profitable business. However, the tri-state and region as a whole (NY, NJ, PA, DE, MD) began to experience a decline in industrial output. Industry began to move to other regions of the country or overseas, or closed completely. Mostly with little forewarning. Consequently, Raritan needed to address the growing concern of sustainability in a stressed and diminishing market. While there was still a substantial industrial customer base, the market was undoubtedly shrinking.

## 3rd GENERATION: VALVE AUTOMATION & INFRA-STRUCTURE GROWTH

In 1980, Bill Richardson Jr. joined the company as a graduate of Boston College. Beginning in inside sales, moving into outside sales as an engineered product specialist, Bill eventually became VP of the company prior to venturing into the business of control valves and automation. In an effort to preserve and expand the valve and actuator side of the business, Raritan Valve & Au-

tomation was founded as a separate company. Joined from the beginning by Joel Cook (V.P.-RVA), he and Bill Richardson Jr. grew that business by adding multi turn automation capability, control valves, field service and in-house machining of custom hardware. RVA would be dedicated in sales and service, to offering quality valves, actuators and controls, automated valves and field service.

Manufacturers began to look for representation and stocking distributors with the resources and experience to promote the technical aspects of valves and actuators. RVA experienced steady growth in the traditional pharma, power, oil and gas, chem-process industries, however there was a need to grow into the water, wastewater infrastructure market.

In 1991, Jim Richardson (Bill Jr.'s brother) became a full-time employee at Raritan Supply, having graduated from St. Joseph's University, as did their youngest brother Tom in 1994 who had earned a degree at Belmont Abbey. The two joined Raritan at a time when change was needed for the company to grow. Together with Bill Sr., and at the request of several mechanical contractors loyal to Raritan over the years, they set out on yet another transformation, entering into the municipal/utility market. While infrastructure spending was on the rise, Raritan began to invest in brands specifically in the water filtration and wastewater markets. Manufacturers of AWWA products were not that plentiful but Raritan began to build brand identity and a reputation for stock and service in the municipal market.

Plant work became the primary focus and because Raritan was historically an industrial distributor, the process piping requirements became a natural fit when combined with underground and fabricated piping, restraints, fittings and accessories.

Simultaneously, Raritan Valve & Automation was also being asked by manufacturers and customers to become more involved in municipal and infrastructure work. RVA and Raritan Supply began to share valve manufacturers and customers alike, pursuing largely the water/wastewater market.

Eventually, the companies merged to form Raritan Group Inc. The company is comprised of Raritan Pipe & Supply and Rari-

tan Valve & Automation, and is owned and operated by Bill Richardson Sr., and his three sons; Bill Richardson Jr., James Richardson and Thomas Richardson.

**EVOLUTION: DEVELOPING A MUNICIPAL PRESENCE**

Over the past 25 years, Raritan has been developing a presence in the municipal market. Through efforts including soliciting municipalities and the contractors that support them, to the engineering firms that provide specs, design and construction management services, both RPSC and RVA worked to provide as many products and services as the market demands.

Tom Richardson began to build the RPS brands that would best address the municipal market, specifically the water/wastewater plant construction and maintenance market. The manufacturers that RPS stocks and sells is impressive. Two developments stand out: American Cast Iron Pipe Co. (ACIPCO) offered Raritan exclusive distribution rights in New Jersey as well as the five-county Greater Philadelphia area (this was significant since their previous relationship with U.S. Pipe was compromised due to the amount of distribution in the region); and Mueller Company signed Raritan on as a full line distributor, Mueller being one of the most widely specified, quality brands in the municipal market.



*Pictured left to right are Miro Gietka, Spencer Richardson, Patrick Richardson, Bill Curtis and Zachary Ghizzone represent part of the next generation.*

RVA followed suit, and in order to package valves and automated valve packages with RPS, Bill Richardson Jr. set out to evolve the company's product offerings to include AWWA products including Mueller. One of RVA's primary actuator brands is AUMA, one of the largest electric actuator manufacturers in the world. To supplement these AWWA compliant products, RVA added service staff to satisfy the retrofit, maintenance and project commissioning requirements the utility business demands.

No less important is the internal coordination of RPS and RVA, including logistics on inventory and movement of over 20,000 line items of inventory, from two location, over a five state territory. That responsibility is handled by Jim Richardson on a daily basis. Jim also is largely responsible for Raritan Group joining Affiliated Distributors (AD), a \$37B buying group that provides the company with commodity procurement advantages that



*Raritan Supply vintage 1960's*

keep Raritan competitive with larger national chain distributors.

**INVESTING IN THE FUTURE: R3 MACHINE & GLOUCESTER CITY**

In an effort for Raritan to broaden its fabrication capabilities and help alleviate the need for a local source for ductile iron pipe and fitting fabrication, the company formed R3 Machine. R3 is a full service pipe and structural steel supplier, in addition to being an ASME section 9 certified weld shop for both carbon and stainless steel. Raritan invested in the equipment to flange ductile pipe, tap fittings and flanges, fabricate custom dutchman spacers, etc.

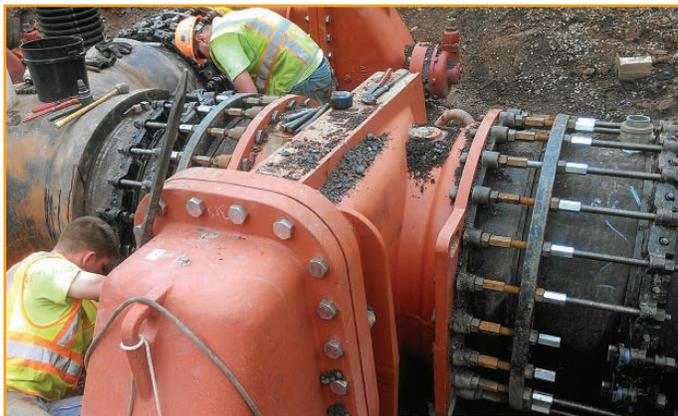
R3 Machine also provides Victaulic grooving, threading, cutting, welding, drilling, tapping, punching, and grinding, etc. The fabrication capability services both Raritan Pipe and Raritan Valve & Automation.

To better service its customers in southern New Jersey, Metro Philadelphia, Delaware and Maryland, Raritan opened a branch in Gloucester City, NJ in June 2017. The branch carries complete inventories of pipe, valves, fittings and accessories to service both industrial and municipal customers, with room to continue expanding. The branch is ideally situated to support contractors servicing the greater Philadelphia and Camden market.

Raritan prides itself in its history, its employees and in its motivation to remain forward thinking.

A recent addition to Raritan's staff is Michael Weller, joining the company in 2016. Formerly the Northeast Regional Sales Manager for U.S. Pipe & Foundry, Mike became the V.P. of Sales and Marketing and responsible for both RPS and RVA, industrial and municipal. With Raritan's growth in staff and territory, Mike brings welcome experience and knowledge to the company.

The company not only has invested in people, but also in technology. Having recently purchased EPICOR/P21 Wholesale Distribution ERP Software to continue improving order, inventory and warehouse management, purchasing and financial reporting and analysis. Some 50 years after the initial IBM system was installed by Bill Richardson Sr., Raritan remains committed to self-improvement in the efforts to better service the customer.



36" RW gate valve with EBAA split tandem megalugs



Bill Richardson, Jr. inspecting delivery of a 60" RW gate valve. (5) more 60", (2) 84" and (1) 132" gate valves to be commissioned at the MCUA Sayreville PS with NE Remsco.

Another ongoing requirement from the customer is fabrication capability. Raritan formed R3 Machine, a full service pipe and structural steel fabricator and supplier, providing Victaulic grooving, threading, cutting, drilling, tapping, punching, grinding etc. Supporting both RPS and RVA.

**PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS: INFRASTRUCTURE SPENDING**

Much of Raritan's UTCA related business is tied to infrastructure spending. The American Water Works Assoc. (AWWA) has estimated that the repair and rehabilitation of below ground infrastructure nationwide could cost nearly \$1 trillion over the next 25 years. With the water/wastewater market in 2018 in the Nation is estimated to be a \$45 billion industry.

In New Jersey, the state enacted the "Water Quality Accountability Act" which requires municipalities to test, repair/replace all hydrant and valves within a present system. In addition, the N.J Environmental Financing Program (NJEIFP) aka "I Bank" has projected a future spend of \$3.7B for drinking water and \$2.7B on clean water.

Some highlighted projects that Raritan has been involved with include:

- Newark Liberty International Airport (D'Annunzio & Sons): 5,000 ft. 16" ACIPCO DI Pipe and (23) 16" Gate Valves
- Route 7 Hackensack River WittPenn Br. (Union Paving): 700ft 48" ACIPCO DI Pipe
- Hartford Road Force Main (Montana Construction): 2500ft 24" ACIPCO DI Pipe
- Middlesex Water Transmission Main (J. Fletcher Creamer & Pact Construction): 12,000ft 42" ACIPCO DI Pipe, 42" & 48" Butterfly Valves
- Six Flags Great Adventure (Coppola Services) Pipe & Valves
- Catskill Aqueduct Connection (Coppola Services) Pipe & Valves
- NJAW Swimming River WTP Emergency (J. Fletcher Creamer) 30", 36", 42" Pipe & Fittings on July 4th

When Raritan Pipe and Supply and Raritan Valve & Automation merged to form Raritan Group, the company's focus was to be able to package plants. To offer the expertise to review specs, strip plans & perform a take-off, quote a bill of material, furnish the product, fabricate the product when required, and commission the job when applicable. To accomplish this RPS and RVA need to work as a team. While not always successful (the competition is tough), the effort is always there and the desire to outperform is at the forefront.

Raritan would also not be successful without the support of several primary manufacturers; American Cast Iron Pipe Co (ACIPCO), Mueller Co., EBAA Iron, Tyler, Star, Victaulic, Apollo and AUMA Actuators. Teamwork includes solid partnerships with quality manufacturers. Raritan has some of the finest manufacturers in the industry and are grateful for their support.

#### TEAM WORK: SALES AND SERVICES

The story at Raritan would not be complete without bringing us current and mentioning several key people who are responsible for managing much of the day-to-day operations in sales and services.

The management of the inside sales team at RPS falls on the shoulders of Miro Gietka. From end-users, OEMs and contractors, Miro divides his day managing both the industrial and municipal sales groups. Many on his team are dedicated to a given market to allow for better customer relations and product knowledge.

His team includes Diane McGovern, Industrial Team Leader for RPS, who has been with the company for nearly 20 years. George

Zamouzakis manages the estimating department, responsible for specification reviews, take-offs, budget estimates and quotations. George also oversees much of the technology at Raritan.

Joel Cook, Miro's counterpart at RVA, has been with the company for over 30 years. Joel is largely responsible for RVA's project estimates, quotes, and submittals. He is also in part, the architect behind much of RVA's success. One of Joel's key people would be Spencer Richardson (son of Bill Jr and a fourth generation) Spencer manages the inside team at RVA and until recently also managed the service department and is largely responsible for the recent implementation of Raritan's Epicor/P21 software.

Two additional key employees are Rob Ruckert who currently manages the branch in Gloucester City and Dave Krosnowski, the warehouse manager in Edison. Both are responsible for the logistics of moving material between New York and Philadelphia metro areas.

#### 4TH GENERATION AND BEYOND

Harry Richardson would be extremely proud to know that his family is still at work. His son of 84, Bill Richardson, is still at the helm every day. His sons (Harry's Grandsons) Bill Jr, Jim, and Tom are currently orchestrating the business at hand with a tremendous staff of over 65 dedicated employees including Bill's grandchildren (Harry's great grandchildren) Spencer, Patrick, and Zachary, who are preparing to help see Raritan reach its 100th anniversary in 2043.

Raritan extends its thanks to all of the UTCA members that have helped the company reach this milestone, and to the UTCA for providing an opportunity to share our story.

