

“Mickey was always a very entrepreneurial company and I could see they wanted that entrepreneurial spirit in their employees as they were growing their business. This was an opportunity for me to virtually run a business.”

— Greg McLaughlin

SPECIAL ISSUE

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2 Decades of Service, in Service, for Mickey & McLaughlin

In June, Greg McLaughlin celebrated two-decades with Mickey Truck Bodies, having spent all of those 20 years in the reconditioning area.

Under McLaughlin’s leadership, the Mickey Reconditioning Division has grown from a single facility in Thomasville, NC, a few miles from the company’s manufacturing complex in High Point, to five company-owned and -operated Service & Reconditioning Centers in strategic locations throughout the country. (And there may be more very soon.)

Each of the five facilities house state-of-the-art equipment and fixtures to accommodate everything from minor repairs to major overalls, including computer controlled paint booths and quality control stations. All work is done completely in-house.

At the juncture of this

important personal milestone, McLaughlin looks back on the past 20 years and discusses the challenges and opportunities that have helped establish Mickey as the largest and most advanced service and reconditioning provider in the business today.

As a point of historical interest, McLaughlin actually succeeded his brother, Steve, as Mickey’s lean man in recon. But Steve is still very much a part of the “family.” Read on.

SPIRIT: Was there a plan or vision that recon would be where it is today, or were you hired just to maintain the Thomasville facility?

McLAUGHLIN: Basically

to run and expand the one location in Thomasville. We really didn’t decide to expand to a second location until about 1988.

SPIRIT: So from 1983 to 1988, you focused on the one facility – expanding the physical plant, adding capabilities, and improving service. What was the operation like back then that made Mickey pursue the recon business so aggressively?

McLAUGHLIN: When Steve got here in 1980, we had an influx of business because Coors was coming east of the Mississippi for the first time. Mickey was inundated with converting existing beer trucks to accept Coors products, meaning they had to be insulated and modified to accommodate the Coors “slip sheet.” Steve even stretched bodies and converted them, and then they all had to be repainted or decaled because a lot of wholesalers changed to Coors or added it as a flagship brand. So we were busy handling the Coors business alone for about a year to 18 months.

SPIRIT: What happened immediately after the Coors onslaught?

McLAUGHLIN: Steve decided he wanted to go out to the West Coast to sell new equipment for Mickey and Mickey was very supportive. But they did say he had to find



Mickey President Dean Sink, left, congratulates Greg McLaughlin on 20 years with the company, all in the recon and service area.

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Key to Mickey Service & Recon Success Has Been 'Localization'

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someone to replace him before he left. So I took over.

SPIRIT: What were you doing before Mickey?

McLAUGHLIN: I was a Branch Manager in Lakeland, FL for Miller Trailers – over-the-road – which was headquartered in Bradenton, FL.

SPIRIT: You had a good job; you were in a good place. Other than helping your brother get out West, what did you see in the Mickey job that was compelling?

McLAUGHLIN: It was a great opportunity to get in early on such an emerging business as recon and service.

SPIRIT: Why do you say compelling?

McLAUGHLIN: Mickey was always a very entrepreneurial company and I could see they wanted that entrepreneurial spirit in their employees as they were growing their business. This was an opportunity for me to virtually run a business. My initial focus was taking the business to the next level after the Coors infusion. I started with the basics – the reconditioning process and equipment, calling on new and existing customers, and building up the used equipment business. In fact the used

equipment business grew very fast, faster than reconditioning. And probably 50% of what we reconditioned were trucks we had bought and were going to sell.

SPIRIT: When did you decide you could run the business successfully from regional satellite plants?

McLAUGHLIN: We didn't really decide we could, we decided we wanted to try. You have to remember the Mickey family had never really been sold on the idea of multiple, local facilities, which is why we have invested so much and so consistently over the years in expanding and updating the main manufacturing complex in High Point (NC). They thought many times about having another production plant, but always came back to centralized manufacturing.

But in this case, we figured since reconditioning was a much smaller operation that really had to be localized, and was something we could keep close reins on, we decided to go forward with a second location in New Jersey. This was in 1989.

SPIRIT: Is that when Steve came back to the service side of the business? *(Steve McLaughlin is currently General Manager of Mickey's*

Northeast Regional reconditioning & Service Center in Famingdale, NJ.)

McLAUGHLIN: Steve was hired even before we opened up the center to go up and scout out potential locations in the Northeast. He really got the ball rolling and he has been up there ever since.

SPIRIT: How soon did you know the expansion into NJ was a home run?

McLAUGHLIN: We went into the market with 5,000 square feet initially, and within a year we doubled that space. Then we decided we needed even more space so we went ahead and built our own facility from the ground up to match our needs for now and in the future. Today we have 24,000 square feet in NJ, almost five times more than when we started.

SPIRIT: By then you were pretty well embroiled in your national expansion plan.

McLAUGHLIN: Absolutely. We were accelerating the business at full throttle. By the time we built in New Jersey we were already open in both Florida (1991) and Illinois (1993). And since then we opened in Texas (1998).

SPIRIT: At what point in the journey did you realize a national network of reconditioning and service centers would fly? Or was it a particular event or trend that helped create the vision?

McLAUGHLIN: We really followed the lead of our salespeople. We had great

Before ...



Much of Mickey's reconditioning these days still comes from accident damage ...

representation in NJ, in Florida. Illinois has always been a strong market for us. When he hired our first salesperson for the southwest we decided we needed to support him and have a place in Dallas. So we really do it to support our sales people and give them a tool to sell the turnkey Mickey package of products and services.

SPIRIT: Was there a turning point in the industry that you

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'By Far' the Largest Recon Network in Beverage Field

(From opposite page)

would say helped fuel the early need for, and growth of, a national reconditioning and service network?

McLAUGHLIN: Most of it started when we began phasing out the steel equip-

... After



... which was the case with this 16-bay trailer that came out looking like new.

ment and turning to all-aluminum bodies and trailers. In 1983 we came out with the 20/20 line, for example, and that was just a great piece of equipment, available in bodies and trailers, which we knew would last for a long, long time – four or five chassis lifetimes if they were just served and reconditioned properly. So we knew the equipment would be there, and we knew it would have to be reconditioned to keep it looking and operating properly, and we figured we should

be the company to do the work.

SPIRIT: So most of the equipment you service today is all-aluminum.

McLAUGHLIN: Everything is aluminum. There's very little steel left in the pipeline. I have a steel unit in here right now and it's probably the first one I've seen in two years. It's a 1976 body. Of course we are going to service it because we service everything. We just do not like saying "no" to a customer.

SPIRIT: Have you identified your next geographical target for expansion?

McLAUGHLIN: This summer I will be traveling through the West Coast with our Beverage Sales Manager for that area to scout out possible locations in that part of the country, most likely in California.

SPIRIT: Why California?

McLAUGHLIN: Again, really to support our sales efforts. We also have a very strong base of equipment in use out there. No other manufacturer has a facility in

that market, so we feel there is a need there.

SPIRIT: When you started in recon, it was primarily a service offered and embraced by the beverage community. How has that evolved?

McLAUGHLIN: First of all, today our facilities are more service centers than reconditioning centers. Reconditioning is part of the service package we offer. And while beverage is probably still the lion's share of our service volume, we by no means exclude any segment of the business. Beverage is about 75% of our business, and the rest is in a variety of dry freight van bodies like Fed Ex, and over-the-road tractors and trailers.

SPIRIT: Are all the facilities fully equipped to handle any type of service or repair?

McLAUGHLIN: They are all modern new facilities with complete turnkey capabilities. They all have factory- and company-certified welders and everyone who works in one of our centers is a full time Mickey employee. All of the facilities have their own in-house state-of-the-art painting booths operated by trained Mickey technicians. Everything is done in-house so that we control the scheduling, the costs and, most importantly,

the quality. That flies in the face of conventional trends in our industry because most service providers and new equipment manufacturers subcontract all their work to third parties, because the cost of starting up and operating a full-line service like this can be very high.

SPIRIT: Do you specialize in Mickey units in your service centers?

McLAUGHLIN: We service any make or model from any year. In fact, we recondition more Hackney units than Hackney does. We recondition more Centennial units than Centennial does, and right down the line. We are by far the largest reconditioning network in the beverage industry and all of the related segments.

SPIRIT: Over the past 20 years, can you characterize how the actual reconditioning and service jobs have changed or evolved?

McLAUGHLIN: Much of the work has been dictated by labor costs. Originally we mainly rebuilt doors and then paint. But as labor costs rose much faster than material costs, it became more economically feasible to replace the entire door rather than try to save aluminum panels with a lot of costly labor. You get

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IN-'SINK'

Turning Something Old Into Something New in 5 Locations

By Dean Sink, President

There are several aspects of Mickey's modern-day Service & Reconditioning Division that reflect this company's overall approach to business in general.

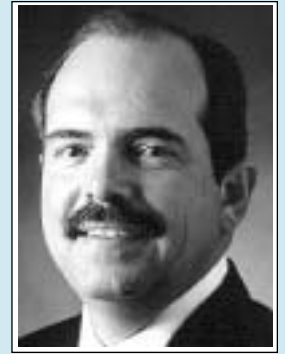
First of all, this division represents the best of Mickey's entrepreneurial spirit and drive. As Greg McLaughlin put it in his interview, he joined us in 1983 because "It was a great opportunity to get in early on such an emerging business as recon and service ... This was an opportunity for me to virtually run a business."

Absolutely. We have always empowered our employees to take ownership in everything they do. By taking ownership, they also make decisions, express ideas, and constantly look to improve the processes we have in place. Most importantly, if they take ownership of their work, they also take pride in their work.

The growth of our Service & Recon Division over the past 20 years also underscores our commitment to meeting our customers' needs with products and services that allow them to run their businesses more efficiently and more profitably. We could have stopped at one major center in NC, but that really wasn't best for our customers in the Northeast. Once we opened in the Northeast, we knew we could offer the same valuable service in the Southeast, and then the Midwest, then in Texas, and next ... (read the story beginning on page 1 to find out where we may go from here!)

At Mickey, we have always invested back into our business - regardless of the state of the economy - in order to better serve our customers. We opened more than one company-owned and -operated Service Center in "flat" economies, and even though the economy is mired in a slump currently, we are still actively pursuing our next location. Our philosophy on this matter is simple: Our customers need to keep their businesses running on all cylinders in any and all economic climates, and we need to be there to help them do that.

Expanding our service division so successfully and so expansively over the past 20 years has certainly been exciting. It's been fun - hard work - but fun. It has absolutely given us a sense of great accomplishment and of course it has been a good business for us. We only hope it's been as good for you as it's been for us.



From 110 to 2,600: Mickey Recon Grows Up and Out

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much better life out of the doors when they are brand new and you get a much better paint job on the new doors than you could on a repaired door. We can also turn the units quicker by doing that, which is important to the customer because they're not making any money off a truck while it's in the shop.

Other than that, it's conventional repair work from minor repairs to major overhauls. And of course, we still get a lot of accident work. But whatever we do - regardless of the size of the job - our goal is to make every unit we

work on look as good as new. We have the most stringent quality requirements of any player in this business.

SPIRIT: Looking back, would say Mickey's modern-day Service & Reconditioning Division has turned out the way you planned?

McLAUGHLIN: In 1983 we reconditioned a total of about 110 units, and in 2002 we did 2,600, including used equipment. We started of course with five dedicated reconditioning employees back in 1980 and today we have close to 100, about an average of 20 per plant. I'm not sure anyone

envisioned that kind of growth.

We have an excellent new equipment sales force, and if you're a customer or a prospect, just knowing if you ever have a problem with a unit you can take it to one of our factory-owned stores and we'll take care of it, is a pretty good selling tool. So our sales guys have really done a great job of building up the business.

We also realized the need to have a dedicated service sales team because the potential is there. Now, every one of our centers has its own dedicated Sales Manager.