

A HISTORY OF MASON INDUSTRIES

It is an unbelievable fifty years since the writer, Harold Harris and Tony Slota started Mason Industries with Pat Lama joining ten years later. Unfortunately, both Harold and Tony are gone and Pat retired. So at the young age of eighty-five, I continue to run the company. Fifty years of continuity and ownership.

Since we have been around so long, most of you know what we do, so we thought a little personal history might be more interesting than another typical advertisement of our "superior" products.

1944



During the early days of World War II, I was studying engineering at CCNY in New York until there was a shortage of engineers to operate the ships of the United States Merchant Marine. Since we were going to be Officers and Gentlemen, the Government came up with a great program to put us on board with no training, as none was required for the position of "Wiper." As the name implies, you wiped everything the ship's engineer pointed to including the sanitary facilities. However, it gave us a great opportunity to work with our hands and spend time gaining practical knowledge and experience in running an Engine Room (basically a small power plant) before moving on

to Operating Engineer in charge of a watch.

After five months of expert wiping, I moved on to the Coast Guard Marine Engineering School in Fort Trumbull, Connecticut, and from there to the Nordberg Diesel School in Milwaukee before earning my license as Marine Operating Engineer of steam or diesel engines of unlimited horsepower.

It has been my pleasure to serve on vessels driven by 3 cylinder reciprocating steam engines, which powered our Liberty Ships just as they did in World War I to Twin Diesel Nordberg engines, steam turbines and perhaps most interesting of all, an opposed piston diesel engine with 36 inch diameter pistons and a 6 foot stroke that ran at the ship's screw speed of 92 RPM. It was so large you could walk into the crank case to check the bearings and cross heads. As ship's machinist, I worked with lathes, milling machines, drill presses, shapers and hydraulic presses as well.

After discharge, I returned to CCNY, got my degree in Mechanical Engineering and five years later, my license as a New York P.E.

1948 was a terrible year for engineers, and jobs were hard to come by. One thing I knew was that I did not want to become a "salesman," and needed to find something that was hands-on rather than only design.

1945



I was more fortunate than most, because I could continue to work as a night engineer on ships in port. This meant you could sleep, but were on call in an emergency. I earned \$85 a week for sleeping while hunting for a \$26 job, which is what engineers started at in 1948.

When this went on for six weeks or so, my father suggested I put an ad in the "Positions Wanted" column instead of continuing to depend on the Employment Agencies and answering advertisements. I told him it was useless as all potential employers were only interested in five years experience. He did not agree as he thought the practical marine experience was priceless and my enthusiasm to take on physical work unusual. So as in normal father son relationships, he placed the advertisement on his own. Mark Twain said something like "When he was sixteen, he couldn't imagine how simple his father was and survived. Then he was amazed by the time he was thirty at how much his father had learned."

We received over twenty responses and one of them was the sales agency for the Korfund Company, so far as I know, the largest and oldest vibration isolation company in the country in 1948. The name Korfund was the German abbreviation for "Cork Foundation." Cork pads were still very acceptable, so the name fit.

Without the slightest idea what "vibration isolation" was, I weathered the interview. Since it was all meaningless, I asked what kind of position they were trying to fill. The answer was "Vibration Control Sales Engineer." So cocky twenty-four year old devil that I was, I stood up and started to leave. I knew I did not want to be a Sales Engineer.

Fortunately, one of the two partners was a very bright sarcastic person. He said he realized I was extremely busy with hundreds of interviews lined up, but could I possibly spare him another ten minutes, so I apologized and sat down. He reversed the question and asked what it was I would like to do.

I told him that I thought I would like to work for a contracting office where part of the time would be designing and if the rest were hitting a star drill with a three pound sledge, that would really be a winner. With that, his face lit up and he said when they explained the physical aspect of their business, everyone else had walked out.

It turned out since so little isolation was used in those days, the only way they could be successful was to become isolation contractors. Instead of selling a set of mountings, they would analyze the machine that was causing difficulty and quote the isolation installed and guaranteed to solve the problem or not get paid. In addition to being salesmen, they had trained themselves to be damn good riggers and I jumped at the opportunity.

While Korfund was the best at the time, many of the mountings and hangers did not have deflections of more than 5/8" and most springs were in housings that bound and would not do the job. I had the engineering passion to solve problems and my employer the financial interest of not walking away when standard product

did not work. Never caring about hours, I started to design at night using new concepts. Korfund would then manufacture to our drawings.

Since we were only the New York agents, it got to be the tail wagging the dog, and there was no choice but to leave and start Vibration Mountings, Inc. where I was a Junior Partner. VMC is still in business today, and many of their existing designs reflect my work up until 1958.

While I was a Junior Partner, there was a basic conflict of interest. My belief had always been that if you manufacture a superior product, the market will recognize and buy it. This has never changed and the constant resistance by my Senior Partner, who was only interested in "the bottom line," led to my becoming ill from frustration. The only way to solve that was to set up Mason Industries after ten years of installation and design experience.

1971



When we opened our doors in 1958, we rented 3,000 square feet. Our catalog was a black pasteboard cover enclosing six pages and held together with brass fasteners. However, we had copied nothing and this hands-on originality and enthusiasm was greeted with open arms. In a short time we built platforms over the whole shop to gain more production space. Since our foreman could not pronounce "mezzanine," they were referred to as "mezzazines" from then on. We broke through the factory wall and gained another adjacent 4,000 square feet, and soon filled that with "mezzazines" as well. (Incidentally, our original capitalization was \$24,000. So how we managed is a story unto itself.)

Around 1968 we pulled wagons down the street and moved ourselves into a 30,000 square foot building and sure enough that was soon covered with "mezzazines" too. We then broke through the walls again and displaced an adjacent body repair shop until we ran out of "mezzazines."



In 1981 we bought and moved into our present 60,000 square foot headquarters, and yes, it is now full of "mezzazines." We rent an additional 50,000 square feet in two buildings nearby to house our tremendous inventory and there is an additional 150,000 square feet Overseas.

The New York and Los Angeles offices and Engineering staff number approximately eighty people of which twenty-one are engineers, about half are licensed. With

all production workers included, we employ approximately three hundred people.

We are more than capably represented by about eighty firms within the United States and around the world.

In the course of building the company, we bought a little outfit named "Fabling" which gave us a foothold on the West Coast and the Industrial Rubber Company for in-house rubber molding. Later we acquired the Mercer Rubber Company, which has developed into a major supplier of handbuilt steam cured rubber expansion joints and more recently we started our own Stainless Steel and bronze flexible hose factory.



Up until the age of sixty-five I was still installing product, so virtually every design is still a problem solver with many at the request of seismic or acoustical engineers to fill their needs in a new area.

Never for a moment do I believe that we could have done this without the tremendous support provided by the professional community that consist of thousands of HVAC engineering and architectural firms as well as acoustical consultants. We have addressed hundreds of ASHRAE Chapters and many national meetings. Without their recognition of our constant effort to improve the technology and suggested specifications, we would still be in that 3,000 square foot 1958 space, and probably without the "mezzazines."

We also offer our thanks to every contractor and manufacturer who form our customer base. We believe they favor us because of the practicality of our designs and lower installed cost when product works the first time. We stand behind what we sell as no other competitor.

We thank our whole representative organization for their hard work, professionalism, integrity and loyalty.

So that is pretty much the whole story. I am eighty-five, so people ask when I intend to retire. Money was never my primary motivation, so should I lose the desire to keep on designing new or improving old product and working with everyone as one world-wide family, that is when I will resign. There is so much left to do I cannot visualize that happening any time soon, but I will try to work faster.

2008



Norm Mason

M I MASON INDUSTRIES, INC.
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"Everyone knows us" was a confident opener, but surely many do not. Please check our web site or email a request for a CD-Rom and Catalog.

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