

CONTRACTOR

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Heat Me

Alaska contractor Rocky Pavey doesn't take flak from arctic winters

SPECIAL TO CONTRACTOR

Heat me! Now there's a bold slogan, but then the owner of Rocky's Heating Service is one of those in-your-face types of guys. And, of course, the slogan works well in Fairbanks, Alaska, where Rocky Pavey hung his shingle in 1994.

Locals in the Fairbanks area know and respect the hydronics experts at Rockys, but they still smile when they see the flaming "Heat Me!" logo on trucks, T-shirts, stationary, hats and all sorts of other gear carrying the message that Rocky's not bashful to let you know about his line of work.

"We have 14,000 degree days up here in Bearflanks, I mean Fairbanks," said Pavey, owner of Rocky's Heating Service. "That's nearly an eight-month heating season. So we're pretty serious about our mechanical systems."

Pavey employs 10 technicians and three office staffers, all immersed in the business of bringing winter comfort to the greater Fairbanks area. The company's focus, said Pavey, is "offering low maintenance, bullet-proof heating systems with an emphasis on energy efficiency."

And, in an area where temperatures drop easily into -50°F range, the reliability of a heating system can easily make a life-or-death difference.

"At the least, it sure focuses us on preventing midnight call-backs.



The new Zone Sentry valve.

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Get ready for prosperity, Nexstar members told

BY ROBERT P. MADER
OF CONTRACTOR'S STAFF

AUSTIN, TEXAS — The crowd cheered when economist Brian Beaulieu told Nexstar Network members that there would be no double dip recession. Beaulieu, CEO of the Institute for Trend Research, had told Nexstar's plumbing, HVAC and electrical contractors in prior years to hang onto cash and batten down the hatches.

"My concern now is that you're not ready for how busy you will get," Beaulieu told the contractors.

The economy will grow slowly in 2011, get much better in 2012 and continue to grow at least through the first half of 2013, he said. Beaulieu spoke at the 30th Nexstar Super Meeting here in late September.

Long range, the economist

predicted, a person in his or her mid-40s or older will never have to suffer a recession this bad again. Also on the good news side, the National Association of Manufacturers reported that 21% of global manufacturing takes place in the United States, Beaulieu noted. Combined with Canadian manufacturing, the U.S. and Canada have two times as much manu-

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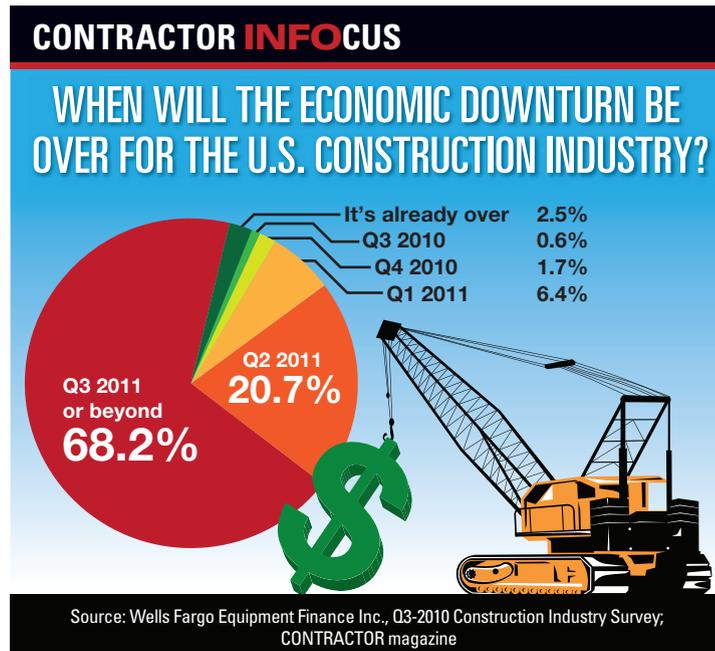


PVC pipe class action lawsuit filed against JM Eagle

BY CANDACE ROULO
OF CONTRACTOR'S STAFF

LOS ANGELES — This September a class action lawsuit was filed on behalf of private commercial property owners and water utilities potentially seeking millions of dollars from JM Eagle for knowingly supplying substandard polyvinyl chlo-

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Alaska contractor Rocky Pavey: Heat Me!

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I'm a guy that — when I finally crawl into bed — I like to stay there for a few hours without being disturbed."

Satellite tracking

On the outskirts of Fairbanks is a jobsite right out of the X-Files. Not far from Eielson Air Force Base is a single-story, nondescript white building where Rocky and his technicians have installed a simple, but state-of-the-art heating system. Behind the purposefully discreet building stand two 25-ft. satellite dishes, one pointed skyward, the other aimed out across the flat tun-



Rocky Pavey uses Taco products for their reliability and efficiency.

dra landscape. Between the building and the satellite dishes is a small shed. After having an employee unlock the shed, Pavey threw open the door and stepped inside.

"Don't ask, don't tell," he said. "We came here to install the heating sys-

tem; no more. We learned quickly not to inquire about what goes on inside the main building. It's some sort of high-tech satellite tracking business, but that's all I'll ever need to know about it.

"The guys that own this place are from Missouri," added Pavey. "They told me they can't tolerate the bitter cold temperatures. That was supposedly the reason for the utmost in reliability on this system. But I'd bet there's some activity going on in there that can't afford to lose time on account of cold computers."

Pavey tugged a massive, track-driven snow blower back out through the door and stepped inside. There, surrounding a new, 98 MBH Buderus propane boiler was a state of the art hydronic system. Heat for the 2,000-sq. ft. main building is piped about 50-ft. deep underground through insulated lines to the building's network of baseboard radiators. Driving circulation and temperature control are a Taco PC700 outdoor reset control and a variable speed Delta-T Taco circulator. Also incorporated into the system is the 4900 air separator.

"Two of my techs, Philip Long and Jonathan Neal, spent two days out here," continued Pavey as he looked around the inside of the shed. "They

tore out a 25 year-old cast iron boiler, and installed all this."

The fittings and components were ProPressed together for a clean look. The focal points of the neatly arranged piping job were three sleek Zone Sentry zone valves.

"The most important requirements for any system we install are reliability and efficiency," said Pavey. "That's why we use a lot of Taco gear, especially the combination of the Delta-T circulator and Zone Sentry valves which delivers on all counts."

According to Pavey, many contractors in Alaska tend to oversize their system circulators, so positive shut-off is also a must. Since virtually no homes are built slab-on-grade, many zone valves are installed in crawl spaces, making reliability and silent operation important features.

"The new Zone Sentry valves remind me a lot of old-time Hollywood actors — the strong but silent types," said Pavey. "There's a lot to like about the new valves, but at the end of the day, you can't ignore the fact that they work hard, hang tough ... and look so dang good!"

Helping the self-made man

"You see a lot of do-it-yourself kind of folks up here," said Pavey. "I think the territory and rugged weather calls for that kind of attitude."

This year, Jeff Hutson of Fairbanks decided he wanted to add a 900-sq.ft. upstairs apartment with a loft, and a

three car garage.

"We don't mess around with winter up here. I can frame an addition and insulate to the nines, but I won't touch the mechanical system," said Hutson. "It's gotta' work without fail, so I called Rocky and said, 'Heat me!'"

"And that we did," said Pavey.

The existing portion of the home was built around 30 years ago, when the demand for workers on the Trans-Alaskan pipeline brought an influx of people to the area. Like many homes of the time, radiant heat was used on both floors.

"Replacing 'pipeline era' boilers has been steady work for a number of years," said Pavey. "The original radiant tubing or baseboard radiators are still in good condition, but the boilers are starting to expire."

The existing, pipeline-era tubing in Hutson's home is non-barrier tubing — polybutylene — so it needed to be isolated from the new portion of the system. For that, Pavey relied on Taco Radiant-X-Pump Blocks, each with a built-in heat exchanger.

Hutson installed PEX tubing on the site of the addition's slab, and poured it himself. Upstairs he did the same, only with lightweight concrete. The heating plant is a 120 MBH, oil-fired, five-section cast iron Buderus boiler. As he did in the secretive satellite mechanical room, Pavey opted to use ProPress to join everything together.

"I consider a sleek, clean mechanical system to be my signature," said Pavey. "I like it when people walk into a mechanical room in the Fairbanks area, and say, 'Oh this looks like a Rocky job.'"

Another way Rocky cleans up his mechanical areas is by using the Watts RBF (residential boiler fill fitting). This small device is piped into a mechanical system near the air separator. It's a three-way ball valve that attaches the expansion tank to the rest of the system. Among its many functions it allows for tank isolation and isolation of the system fill valve. When installed, it can eliminate as many as a dozen ½-in. fittings from the system and save time and headaches servicing the system.

"Our goal here at Rocky's Heating service is to create super-dependable, extremely efficient mechanical systems," concluded Pavey. "Alaskans need to be smart and frugal. Even though we have America's crude oil aorta running through our backyard, Alaskans pay among the highest price for oil in the nation. The same goes for electric. Kind of ironic, isn't it?"

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