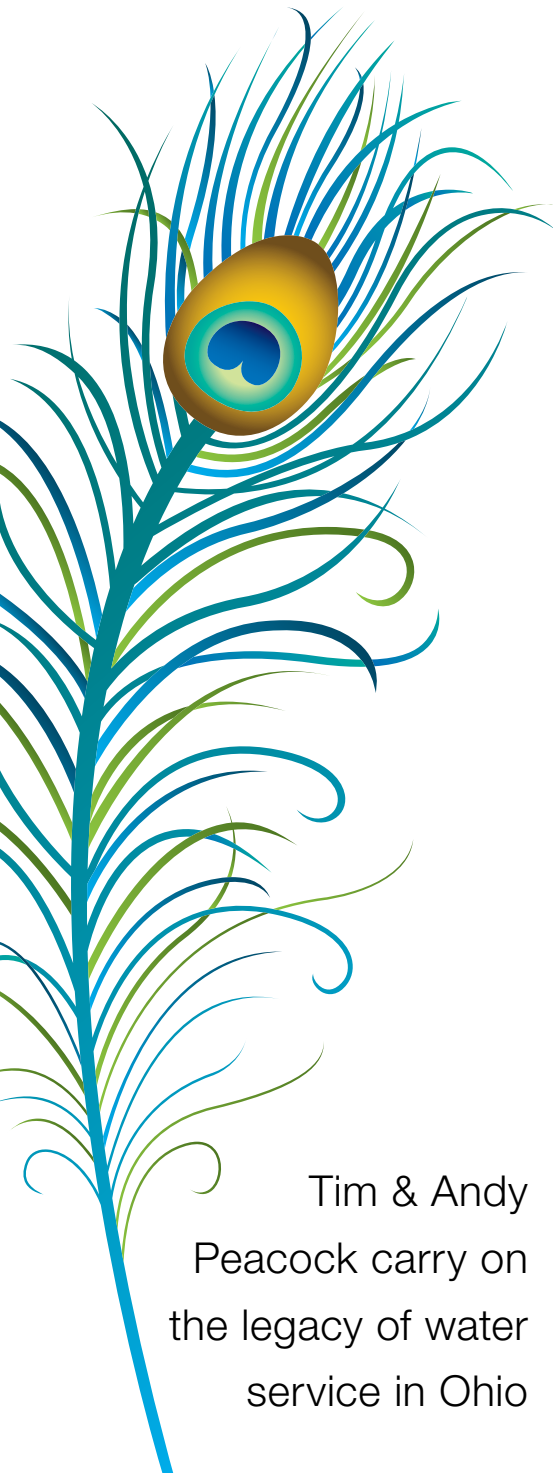
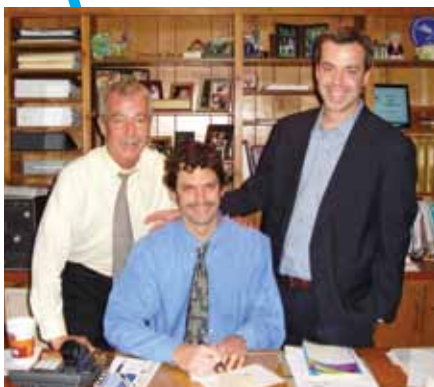


# Generations of Water Treatment

By Williette Nyanue



Tim & Andy Peacock carry on the legacy of water service in Ohio



Tim (center) and Andy (right) took over the business after many years working with their father (left).

**W**hen brothers Andy and Tim Peacock took over Peacock Water in Ohio, the company was already three generations old. In 1906, Andy and Tim's great grandfather cofounded Peacock Brothers Plumbing with his brother. In 1953, the brothers decided to delve into the water conditioning business, and renamed the company Servicesoft. Tim and Andy's grandfather took over the business in 1962, renaming it Neldon Peacock and Sons Inc., and in 1971, after serving in Vietnam, Tim and Andy's father, Tim Peacock, Sr., returned to help his parents run the company.

During Tim Sr.'s tenure, Andy and Tim were regulars, working there during summers in high school and college. "We spent a lot of our youth running service calls with our dad and going on salt deliveries," Andy recalled, so transitioning into the business after college was a natural progression for both men.

This preparation, along with 15 years of full-time work with their father, prepared them to take over the business when Tim Sr. died in 2011. "After finding out that dad was sick with cancer, we had about a year with him before he passed away. So he spent a lot of time getting affairs in order and we worked a lot," Tim said.

## A Little Bit of Everything

Today, Peacock Water has assisted approximately 30,000 customers in a service area that spans about 100 miles east to west. It boasts six offices in Kenton, Upper Sandusky, Bucyrus, Lima and Norwalk, Ohio, with 52 employees.

Peacock Water's customer base is made up of about 75% residential and 25% commercial customers. The company offers a range of services in a geographical area that experiences high sulfur, hardness and iron in its water. Some services include bottled water and salt sales, and installation, service and rental of water softeners.

"When my dad first started, exchange tanks are what they were dealing with. So that sort of monthly income idea was always deeply ingrained in him," Andy said. And although both Andy and Tim came across many dealers that scoffed at rentals—saying it was an old style of business—Andy said that the rental income was partly responsible for

carrying the company through tough economic times.

## Association Membership

Another practice important to both brothers is association membership. Peacock Water belongs to the Water Quality Assn. and the Ohio Water Well Assn. "We don't drill wells, but we think it's important to have memberships in those types of organizations that are affiliated with us in a way," said Tim, who serves as the current president of the Ohio Water Quality Assn.

Tim cited two particular benefits of association membership: It standardizes the industry and it offers great training. "It takes us to the level that's a little bit higher, and says not only can we put in a water softener, but we belong to a national association that continually works to establish best practices for sales, service and installation of water treatment equipment in general," he said.

He added that the focus on water treatment in preparation for tests and certification helps water dealers be pertinent and legitimate. Andy agreed, adding that association membership provides dealers with the contacts they need when the going gets tough.

"It's not uncommon to run across a water problem that is really unusual in your area, and you will have a huge network of people that you can reach out to, including your vendors, but also other members of the Water Quality Assn. who can help you through that," Andy said.

## Changes

Through the generations, the Peacocks have seen many changes in the water industry. While his father saw a switch from exchange tanks to automatic softeners, Andy has personally witnessed an increase in point-of-use for drinking water. "Point-of-use is growing hugely now in terms of drinking water, and our reverse osmosis sales have gone up substantially," he said.

Andy credits this increase to dealers and customers being more aware of drinking water and trying to avoid contaminants as much as possible in their food and water. "We used to have long meetings about trying to figure out ways to explain to people how important drinking water was, but that change seemed to happen organically," he said.

Another change that Peacock Water has encountered is in marketing tactics. The brothers recognize the importance of the Internet in marketing and advertising. The company has a website and a Facebook page where it interacts with visitors as much as possible. "I see that as being a huge part of the future," Andy said. "The payback's been huge. We get a lot of business because of the website and directly through the website."

While the industry continues to change, there are a few things that have remained tried and true. The majority of marketing is still done through the company's direct mail flyer program. "I really think that all of these things rely on the word of mouth at their base," Andy said. "I don't think we can build a reputation with a website. I don't think we can build it with Facebook. We can add to it, but we really rely on our good work and good name."

## Strong Service

Despite the changes, Andy said that the water industry is in a good place and that he is proud to be part of it. "I think there was a time when it was a very sales-dominated industry, and things like product knowledge and service to the customer sort of took a backseat to sales technique and sales numbers," he said. But he has seen that the industry is getting better at putting customers—an idea that his father spoke highly of. "That was really important to him. It could be the smallest customer service issue and he would be right on it," Tim said.

This customer service approach has become engrained in the fabric of the business. "It's funny to think about this, but we have to train people that join with us that we drive a bottle of water 40 miles if somebody is out of water," Tim said. "It's such a part of our structure that you don't realize until you have to tell a person. It's just what we do." *wqp*

Williette Nyanue is assistant editor for *Water Quality Products*. Nyanue can be reached at [wnyanue@sgcmail.com](mailto:wnyanue@sgcmail.com).

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