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COMPANY PROFILE

Back to the Basics with Connectra Fusion

“If Connectra Fusion could be personified, he’d be a middle-aged guy wearing khakis and workboots and driving a pickup truck. Reliable, rugged, hard-working, and from a blue collar background...”

At first this might seem like an unusual way to describe a company, particularly if you are the president.

But for Ron Underwood, President of Connectra Fusion Technologies in Gainesville, Texas, this description accurately sums up the laid-back corporate culture and philosophy for which his company is so well known, and appreciated by both its customers and staff.

Connectra Fusion’s business is fusion, pure and simple. Or, as their corporate slogan denotes: “simply fusion.” The company offers a full line of equipment and accessories for performing the heat fusing of polyethylene (PE) pipe. It has carved out its niche within the fast-growing, multi-billion dollar PE pipe industry through its “simple is smarter” approach.

The benefits of Connectra’s fusion machines are many—not only are they easy to use and highly reliable, they are significantly less costly to purchase and maintain than more high-tech versions offered by competitors.

“We like to think ourselves as ‘a breath of fresh air’ in today’s culture where technology is endlessly reinventing and replacing itself,” explains Underwood. “Compared to our competition who make sophisticated equipment with all the fancy bells and whistles, we offer simple, precision-made products that are equally efficient at fusing a quality joint.”

According to Underwood, the heat fusing of PE pipe is a technology that “virtually anyone” can perform with a little training—at least on a Connectra machine. While competitors advertise “universities” which people must attend to learn how to use their equipment, Underwood says that it only takes a few hours to train someone how to fuse a standard pipe with a Connectra machine. His point: why make it more complicated than it needs to be?

“We have never claimed to be the ‘rocket scientists’ of the fusion world,” he explains earnestly. “In fact, we are here to *de-mystify* fusion. As long as you are following the correct procedures and quality assurance guidelines, our machines will basically do the job for you.”

It’s an offering that is working well for the target market, says Underwood. “Our customers have reported time and time again that they experience comparable or better productivity, but less down time for maintenance when compared to more complicated equipment. Sometimes, simple really is the best way.”



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The “simple is best” culture becomes evident the moment one steps through the door into Connectra’s headquarters, where all the employees are wearing jeans, every door is open and helping hands abound.

Underwood, who starts off every day by heading into Connectra’s plant to wish each staff member good morning, emphasizes his staff’s team-oriented approach to making customers happy.

“Our customers—mostly pipeline contractors—appreciate our relaxed, easy culture. We have a very hands-on approach; everyone pitches in to get the job done quickly and efficiently. We all wear many different ‘hats’ and do whatever it takes to get the job done.”

Connectra’s “simple is smarter” approach has not changed much over the years—a fact that Underwood says remains a source of great pride for the company.

“The lineage of our product really speaks for itself,” he explains. Connectra’s earliest ancestor was Christie Pipeline, started in 1948 by Bill Christie. Ron points out that Christie was very proud of his blue-collar roots and his company’s hands-on culture and approach.

“Today, Connectra still operates with this philosophy. We want to be a company who keeps its word, is ready to pitch in, is there for customers and operates on the up-and-up. It worked for our forebears and it works for us.”

Although the company is well in touch with its historical roots and philosophies, Connectra looks forward to the future wave of growth in the industry with excitement and anticipation.

“We are in an interesting place these days,” he admits with evident enthusiasm. “The polyethylene pipe industry is poised for accelerated growth, particularly in the water industry. We are definitely planning to be onboard for that ride.”

Connectra’s “ride” got a little more interesting in early 2008, when its parent company, Central Plastics Company of Shawnee, Oklahoma, became part of the large corporation Georg Fischer. Georg Fischer is a global leader in supplying metal and plastic piping systems to transport liquids and gas in industry, building technology and utility applications.

“We are excited to be adding Connectra’s solid reputation in the U.S. and expertise in polyethylene pipe fusion tools to our global range of products and services,” said Chris Blumer, President of the Division America for GF Piping Systems. “It’s a win-win situation for everyone involved, including Connectra’s loyal customer base.”

Underwood says that joining Georg Fischer has been a very positive experience for Connectra.

“Although we are still the ‘same old’ Connectra in our day-to-day business operations,” he explains, “having access to George Fischer’s vast global ‘brain’ of experience has been very stimulating and we are excited at the prospect of bringing our ‘simple is smarter’ approach to a larger, more



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international market.” Plus, adds Underwood, the company’s current customers are benefiting from synergies and improvements throughout its operations.”

No matter how much demand grows for heat fusion technology, or how global Connectra goes in the future, Underwood truly believes that his company’s “simple is smarter” product offering will only increase in popularity.

“We are certain that there will always be a demand for simplified, ‘no frills’ heat fusion technology. People are getting tired of the rat-race of ever more expensive gimmicks. We eagerly embrace new technology, but *only* if it has a cost efficient result. If a reliable method exists, why make it more complicated than it needs to be?”

“It’s not art—only simple science.”

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