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KC ELECTRICAL SUPPLY PREPARES TO CELEBRATE 90 YEARS SERVING KANSAS CITY



Kaylin Crain, president, Kansas City Electrical Supply



John Owens, treasurer, Kansas City Electrical Supply



Colin Hinkley, sales manager, Kansas City Electrical Supply

When Jay and Harriett Mullins opened a grocery store that included an aisle of electrical supplies in 1927, they had no way of knowing that Kansas City Electrical Supply would be a thriving electrical distribution equipment and switchgear supplier run by their great-granddaughter nearly a century later.

Company President Kaylin Crain is the fourth generation of the Mullins family and oversees 47 employees in two locations. The company serves light industrial, commercial and residential electrical contractors with manufacturing, maintenance and repair needs.

The company operates on its original motto, "Every time we make a friend, we grow a little."

While the industry around it has been consolidating, with smaller companies being bought out by larger conglomerates, Kansas City Electrical Supply remains proudly independent.

"We've been approached about selling, but I've never really considered it," Crain said. "I know that (selling) would really affect our employees' lives and so as long as we're rolling along pretty well, I don't think about it."

The consolidation around it has actually been a boon to the small business. "We've been very fortunate to pick up some really talented people when there have been buyouts of local distributors and the employees didn't like the culture of a big company and we were lucky to pick them up," said John Owens, the company's treasurer.

As a family-owned, independent small business, Kansas City Electrical Supply has managed to attract and retain long-time and loyal employees. Owens has been with the company for 33 years and he says the organization promotes a family atmosphere where employees are free to act with autonomy.

KC's lighting department has taken on some high-profile jobs in recent years, and when those jobs prove successful, they boost the company's resume. For example, the company recently completed a \$1.8 million remodel for State Street Corp., and was recently awarded a \$2.5 million lighting project for a new Amazon distribution center.

"We like to surround ourselves with hard workers," Crain said. "I think when you work hard, it pays off. And the better a company is at what it does, the better salespeople it attracts."

Crain grew up in the family business, but it was not the career she originally pursued. She earned an undergraduate degree in architecture from the University of Kansas and worked in that industry for about four years.

"During that time, I realized architecture wasn't everything it was cracked up to be for me, career-wise," she said.

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Today the company has two locations, one in Kansas City, Missouri and the other in Lenexa, Kansas, about 30 minutes away.

She joined the family business 19 years ago, working in finance with Owens, then becoming corporate secretary. When the company's president, Crain's mother Joyce Jones, died in 2013, Crain assumed the helm.

Today the company has two locations, one in Kansas City, Missouri and the other in Lenexa, Kansas, about 30 minutes away. About a year ago, the company moved locations within Lenexa, nearly doubling its space to about 50,000 square feet, to accommodate additional needs for warehouse, office and parking space.

Kansas City Electrical Supply differentiates itself through its material kitting service, which provides customers with requested materials to be delivered to the customer's jobsite complete as scheduled. For example, a contractor may not have storage facilities or containers on compact job sites, so the company stores materials

and delivers them when the contractor needs it, be it lighting, switchgear, wire or pipe.

"That's not something a lot of distributors do. That's really a selling point for us," said Sales Manager Colin Hinkley, adding that the last five years have been the best in the company's history.

Crain said the company has also been moving towards more collaboration in lighting design. "Instead of taking something that an engineer or architect did, I want to go outside the box," she said. "I want to find other fixtures that will work for our customers and then design it for them."

Owens agrees. "We try to make sure that our relationships with our customers are on multiple levels—salesperson, lighting, management, inside sales, gear department. Customers know that a whole team is here to help them and I think that's important.

It makes the relationship."

What also helps the company succeed is its IMARK membership, including the bi-annual INet networking meetings. "We're in a group of 12 to 15 distributors and we're not in each other's markets. We, everyone, can ask questions and share concerns with each other," Owens said. Employees also use the online product training through IMARK University, powered by BlueVolt.

IMARK also offers something else.

"We have access," Hinkley said. "We get more cooperation from IMARK suppliers and there's a partnership when it comes to achieving annual goals. And I don't think we'd have that if it were not for our IMARK membership."