



Tim Fischer

Okahumpka, Florida



Vac-Tron Equipment

Learn about Florida Entrepreneur Tim Fischer:

Originally founded in 1997 by Don Buckner, Vac-Tron Equipment, manufacturers of hydro excavation, air excavation, jetting and industrial vacuum equipment, has grown from one employee and one piece of equipment to producing 23 units per week with a dedicated workforce of 115 employees. Today, thanks in part to the steadfast leadership of company president Tim Fischer, Vac-Tron is widely considered the industry's innovative leader and one of the world's largest producers of industrial vacuum equipment and vacuum excavation equipment. Fischer's involvement with Vac-Tron goes back to 2008 when Buckner partnered up with an investment group Fischer was working with at the time.

"The investment group, Republic Financial Corporation, partnered up with Buckner and purchased a majority share the company," Fischer

said. "At the time, I was a Senior Managing Director for Republic Financial, serving as the liaison between Vac-Tron and Republic Financial.. I really took a liking to the company and the industry and in 2016 I transitioned into the role of President."

As Fischer shared, the original founder, Don Buckner, was a visionary and an entrepreneur at heart. He saw an opportunity and ran with it. When he developed his first product, he rented a Chevy Blazer, welded a hitch to the back of it, hooked up a trailer and drove across the country to sell it. After selling the first unit to Ditch Witch, he did it all over again. After selling direct for several years, he utilized a distribution model and then a dealer network model. Today, over 90% of Vac-Tron's distribution is handled through Vermeer, a 70 year old iconic manufacturer and dealer with 120 stores nationwide. In 2019 Vac-Tron will manufacture their 7,000 unit.

Keeping a competitive edge

Fischer shared some of Vac-Tron's challenges, then and now, and what they're doing to set themselves apart from the competition. "Initially, it was really about educating people on how the product could be utilized," he said. "Even ten years ago, if you were on a job-site, most people wouldn't know what our equipment was. It's basically a safer way to dig and excavate. Think of it like a combination between an extremely high-powered pressure washer and an equally as strong shop-vac. Today, our challenges are more about ramping up our supply chain to meet growing demand and finding great talent.

In terms of the value we bring to our customers and how we set ourselves apart from our competitors, we pride ourselves on being the

highest quality vacuum excavator in the market. We're not the cheapest, but the quality and pride that goes into our products is unmatched. Everything is made from the ground up. We're always seeking feedback from our customers and look to see how to improve product performance based on how it's being utilized in the market. Our territory reps do a great job engaging with our customers and staying involved. Also, vacuum excavation is our sole focus. Our competitors have three or four different product lines. We do one thing and we do it really well."

Strong culture leads to growth

As Fischer shared, the culture is one of hard work, pride, innovation and strong communication. Located in a rural part of Lake County, Vac-Tron attracts a lot of local talent and doesn't have to compete with Orlando or Tampa for employees. When Fischer took over, he implemented an acronym that every employee lives by. It's called SILQ (pronounced "silk") and stands for Vac-Tron's commitment to be the leader in Support, Innovation, Lead Time and Quality. There are signs with the acronym around the plant and monthly state of the union meetings where these principals are preached and re-enforced. The company focuses on providing a family environment with its employee base and provides benefits such as catering lunch monthly for all employees, in the summer months they'll bring in an ice cream truck, and provide gift cards for employees who help provide product and process improvement ideas. Vac-Tron focuses on a continual improvement initiative, knowing there is always room for improvement.

Notable community contributions

Another point of pride for Vac-Tron is their commitment to support the

local community and give back to organizations in need. They've built playgrounds for the schools attended by employee's children, donated money to an after-school program for the Sumter Youth Center and helped another school build a baseball field. As Fischer shared, investing in their employees demonstrates that Vac-Tron truly cares for its workforce and the community in which it operates.

Fischer shared his thoughts on doing business in Florida and how local partnerships have benefited the business. "Doing business in Florida is great," he said. "You have a strong talent pool, the weather is always nice and the transportation options for getting our units out of the state are abundant. When it comes to partnerships, we've seen a tremendous amount of value working with organizations like FloridaMakes, GrowFL and Lake Technical College. In fact, we've utilized Lake Tech as a feeder system for talent. We've also done things with Valencia and other local schools. It's good to provide that generation with an understanding of what's out there."

What it means to be a Florida Companies to Watch Honoree

"It's truly an honor that people recognize what we're doing," he said. "As a Florida manufacturer, it's important because sometimes Florida gets a stigma that tourism is all we have. What a lot of people don't realize is that there's a lot of momentum around manufacturing in Florida. The energy level is strong. As far as our employees, there's a real level of pride to have someone else recognize their efforts."

In terms of why we were selected, I think people who have come here, have seen what we've done and how we've grown. Sometimes energy and manufacturing don't go together, but there's a real sense of

excitement and energy around here. Further, we all love a challenge. To go from eight units per week to over 20 has been a challenge, but we're committed and passionate about what we're doing."

Fischer's goals for Vac-Tron are to continue the impressive growth of the company. On the employee side, he wants to provide his employees with careers and not just jobs. They've had a tremendous amount of success by taking this approach. Stories include an employee starting on a forklift who is now a senior welder and an assembly line worker who is now working in the parts and service department. Vac-Tron recognizes that their number one asset is their workforce, and they want their employees to grow as the company grows.

Advice for aspiring entrepreneurs

Fischer shared some great advice for aspiring entrepreneurs. "What makes America what it is are those people who are willing to go out on a limb and start their own business," he said. "Not all great ideas survive, but it's better to have tried and failed than to not try at all. Failures make you stronger. Believe me, every entrepreneur is not batting a thousand. If you fail, get back up and try again. That's exactly what Don did. People probably thought he was crazy hauling his machine across the country, but he had a vision and he put everything into it. Twenty years from now, you don't want to look back and think, 'I should have tried that'."

Awards and Recognition

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