

Knapp Supply 90th Anniversary



Times Photo

Planning the show (from left): Thomas Mock, inside sales manager; Jack Petro, secretary-treasurer; Charles Price, president; and Robert B. Nichols, warehouse manager.

Two years before General Custer and crew came out second best in that hair-lifting party with Messrs. Crazy Horse, Sitting Bull and friends, another ex-Civil War officer was doing some business pioneering in Union City, Indiana. In 1874 Captain Alex A. Knapp started a "Plumber, Steam and Gas Fitter" supply company in that city.

That was 90 years ago. In May, Capt. Knapp's creation, now located in Muncie, threw a big anniversary celebration and industrial show. During the two-day event, several hundred invited guests toured the premises of Knapp Supply Company and viewed exhibits of industrial products displayed by 20 manufacturers. There were products exhibited that the old Captain wouldn't have dreamed of in his wildest imaginations. The hot selling items in his day were such things as rawhide belting, wood pumps and wick. But on display at the anniversary exhibition of Knapp Supply were such complex lines as power transmission equipment, pneumatic clutches, electric hoists and the like.

Though a relatively small show, president Charles F. Price felt it was extremely successful. "A very high percentage of the people here were really interested and not just curious. I was pleased that so many production and engineering people attended, as well as purchasing agents. Because of the engineered nature of the products we were displaying, we particularly wanted to attract the plant people who actually use them."

At least one big sale was consummated right at the show. Knapp salesman, Jud Wright, 29, reported selling \$2,000 worth of products during the show. "I feel I wouldn't have gotten the business if it hadn't been for the exhibits," he said.

We will get into the details of the show later along. But first a few words about the company and the many changes it has seen over a 90 year span. For example, in



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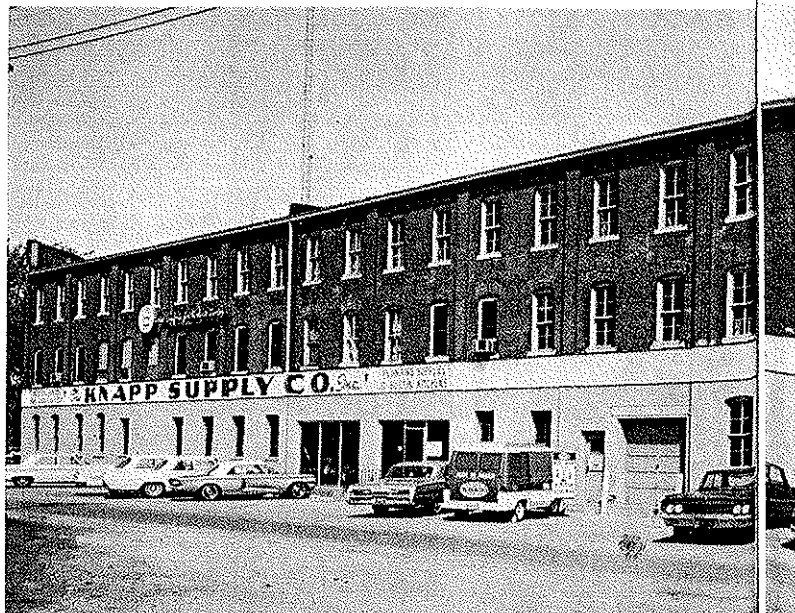
Dixie Bebout, receptionist and secretary at Knapp Supply, shows the door prizes. None were contributed. All were purchased by Knapp. Drawings were made both days.

Knapp Supply Co. moved into this building in late 1926.



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Other distaff employees give welcome kits to each visitor. Bag contains souvenir matches, memo pad, letter opener, anniversary brochure, Knapp Supply pencils, etc.



Co. Celebrates With Exposition

the old days, Knapp Supply salesmen traveled on horseback. Today, they use automobiles equipped with direct radio communications with the home office.

Back In 1874

Captain Alex A. Knapp served in the Union Army and was severely wounded at the Battle of Chickamauga. In 1874, he started the company, concentrating on plumbers and machinists supplies, but not confined to that. At one time, oddly, he was the state's largest distributor of terra cotta yard and lawn ornaments.

In 1889, the business was incorporated as Knapp Supply Company. One L. C. Huesmann had an interest in it, later bought control, and served as president for many years. In 1926, he moved the company to Muncie, 32 miles west of Union City, because Muncie had come to be the largest city in the area and offered a better potential.

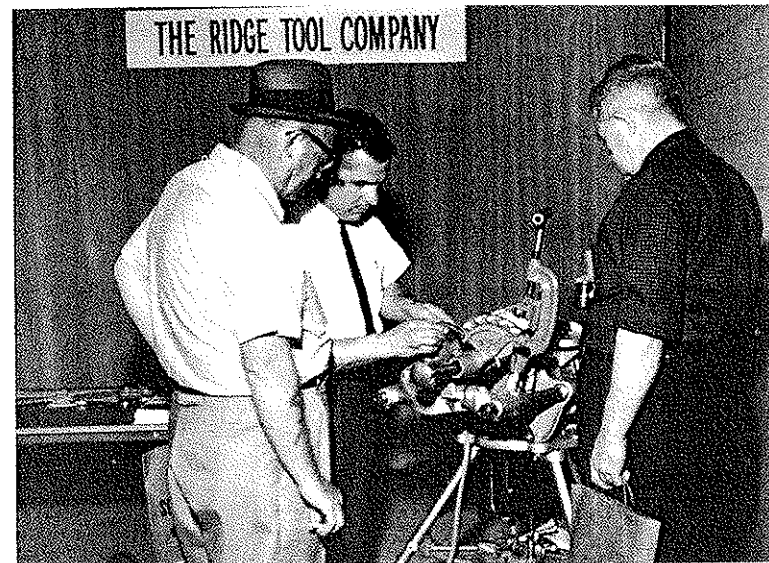
William E. Price, father of the present head, became president of the company in 1930. Charlie Price joined the firm in 1935 and, in 1950, succeeded his father as president. The company has undergone a considerable evolution under his leadership. When he took over, plumbing and heating represented 60 percent of the business and industrial products the remainder. Today, sales are 50 percent industrial, 30 percent plumbing and heating and 20 percent of volume is in kitchen products.

Why this pronounced and deliberate change of product mix? Incredible as it might seem to some readers of this piece, there *are* product lines more competitive, more difficult in which to achieve a fair profit, than industrial supplies and equipment. Plumbing and heating has been a really rough ball game in recent years. And that is primarily why Price switched the emphasis to industrial lines at Knapp Supply. As for the kitchen units, while they are complementary to plumbing, the



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Jack Petro holds ticket box for Donald Fleming, of Raybestos-Manhattan, who draws the winning number. Charles Price, president, at right, selects the gift to be presented.

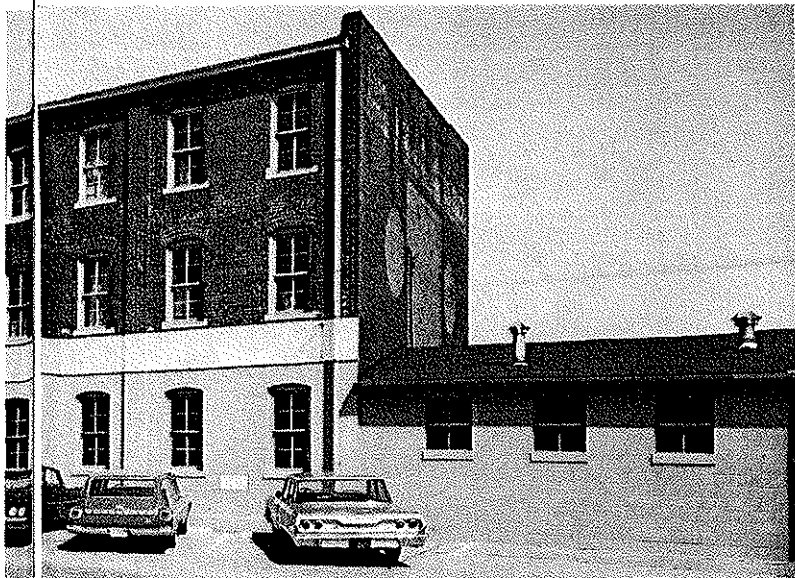


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Jerry Given, (center), The Ridge Tool Co., demonstrates a pipe threading machine for two visitors. Most exhibits were "live", using some form of animation or movement.

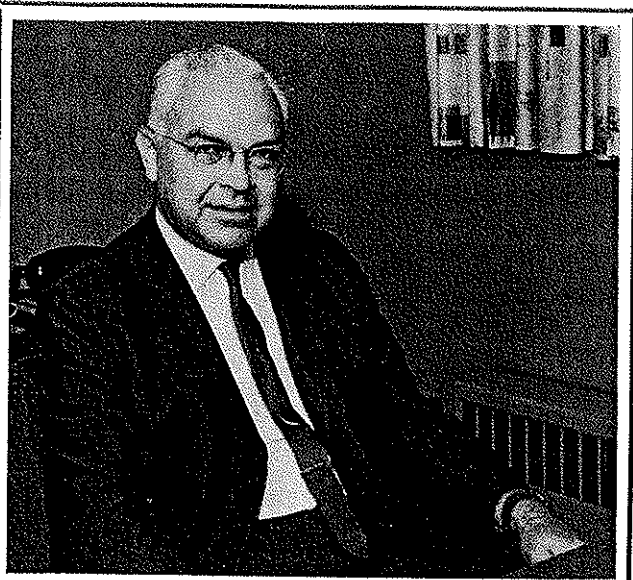
5. Second building; pipe shed are in rear. Note radio tower.

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A catered buffet was provided in this tent from 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. both days. Tent was pitched in the storage yard. Note the large pipe warehouse in the background.



Times Photo

Charles Price succeeded his father as president of Knapp Supply Co. in 1950. Price is currently vice president of the Central States Industrial Distributor's Association.

price and competitive situation in them doesn't present quite the same kind of blood bath.

Company Today

Knapp Supply's facilities contain a total of over 40,000 sq. ft. In addition to the main building, there is a second building just behind, used for storage of slow moving and seasonal items, and a pipe shed, which was constructed in 1951. There is also a rail siding which is used. The company receives about 20 cars of steel pipe a year and an equal number of freight car shipments of kitchen units.

In addition to Price, the management staff consists of three men who have been with Knapp for a combined total of 58 years. **Jack Petro**, secretary-treasurer and a director, has been with Knapp for 18 years. He handles the financial end of the business and also serves as office manager. **Thomas C. Mock**, inside sales manager, supervises telephone sales, the display room, and all aspects of pricing. He has been with the firm for 15 years. **Robert B. Nichols**, the warehouse manager, is a 25-year veteran with Knapp.

Total employment is 20, of whom three are outside salesmen and two are inside salesmen. The trading area is a 40 mile radius around Muncie. Two of the outside men handle industrial accounts only; the other works the plumbing, heating and kitchen trade. Of the two inside men, one takes primarily industrial calls; the other the remainder. About 25 percent of total volume is done at the counter.

Each outside salesman averages 100 accounts that are called on regularly. "We go over our accounts annually. We figure," said Price, "the sales per account, estimate the potential of each account, and get the cost per call for each salesman's visit. Then we figure how much business we expect from each call, averaged over a year's time, to see if we can break even on that account."

Radio Communications

Knapp Supply is strongly persuaded of the importance and value of field salesmen being able to communicate with the office — quickly and economically.

In the old days, they were great users of telegrams and had their own code words that stood for common phrases, thereby expediting the message and saving money. For example, the word "Effusion" stood for "We should be pleased to negotiate with you." Another: "Emerald" meant "Can you make pattern for?"

Today if the Knapp salesman doesn't know the answers, he goes to his car, radios headquarters, and gets all questions answered in a flash. It all started in 1960 when they installed the low power citizen's band, but it was not very satisfactory. There was lots of interference because many people used the same frequency. Up to 20 miles could be reached in some circumstances on the citizen's band, but normally ten miles, and in many cases, even five miles was the limit.

After a year, Knapp went to the business radio service which is higher powered and can reach much farther. Their new equipment is 100 watts. "We can get up to 50 miles relatively clear on the new two-way radio. I have been at the edge of Indianapolis and called to the office here," said Price. "Some locations aren't so good to call from because of the contours of the land."

Knapp has five mobile units plus the base unit. All salesmen's cars are equipped. The purpose of the radio system is two-fold: first, to enable the salesmen to make maximum use of the all-too-few selling hours in a day; second, to improve their service and effectiveness.

The men can spend more time calling, with less necessity for coming into the office and with no time wasted hunting for a telephone. And since the office can reach them at any time, there is a better "deployment" of their efforts. Messages — whether of problem, opportunity, or whatever — reach them instantly, often at a real saving in travel time.

The complete system cost about \$4,000. It is supposed to pay for itself in 10 to 12 years in savings on telephone bills alone. But the true measure of its value, Price believes, is the way it makes each salesman more effective. He says that two men with radios can handle an area that would normally take three men to cover adequately.

About 150 calls are made a week. The total height — building plus antenna — is limited to 170 ft. above ground by the Federal Communications Commission. If higher, it must have a red light. This means more weight and expense. The 120 ft. Knapp tower has an 8 ft. antenna. This, on top of the three story building, reaches to 165 ft.

Industrial Show

Now to get on with the show. The idea of having such an event had been growing on Price for several years. He had had some experience earlier with plumbing shows and, now that industrial lines had become the company's major activity — it seemed desirable to have a show just on those products. With the company's 90th anniversary coming up, Price decided the time had arrived.

He had been compiling a file of trade paper articles on distributor shows for several years, and had also talked with distributors who had held them. He started planning the event in January.

Price chose a tentative date for his show, then checked with the local Chamber of Commerce to see if there were any civic conflicts. There was a conflict. A service organization had planned a home show on the dates he had selected, so he changed his date. He also had to dodge the Triple Industrial Supply convention in Atlantic City and the Design Maintenance show in

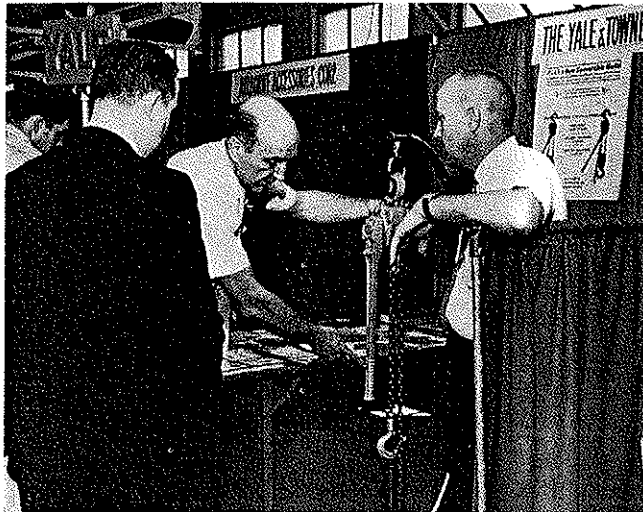
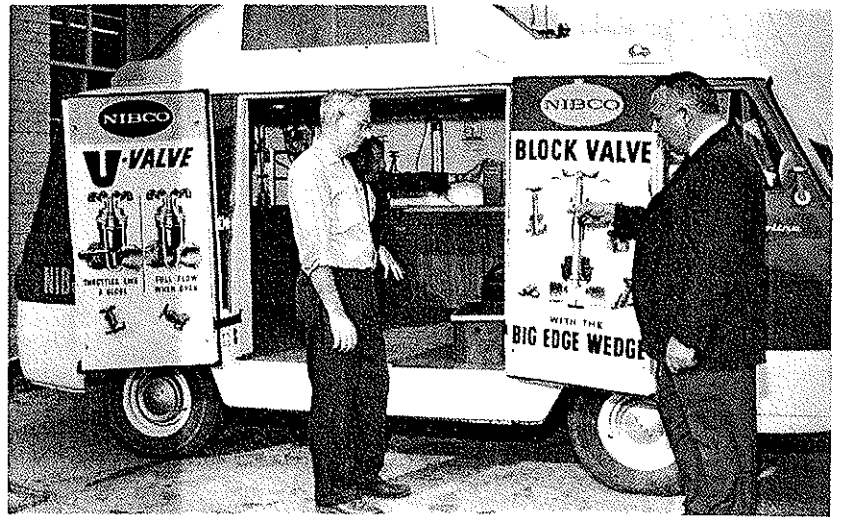
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At 90th Anniversary Industrial Product Show Of Knapp Supply Company

For the big show, Knapp Supply cleared a section of their warehouse and erected 20 booths for the use of participating suppliers. An extra power line had to be brought into the building to provide sufficient electricity for the many operating machines. Historically, Knapp has been noted as a pipe, valve and fitting house. A primary objective of the show was to dramatize that the company also carries lines of tools, engineered products, power transmission, and usual MRO supplies and products.

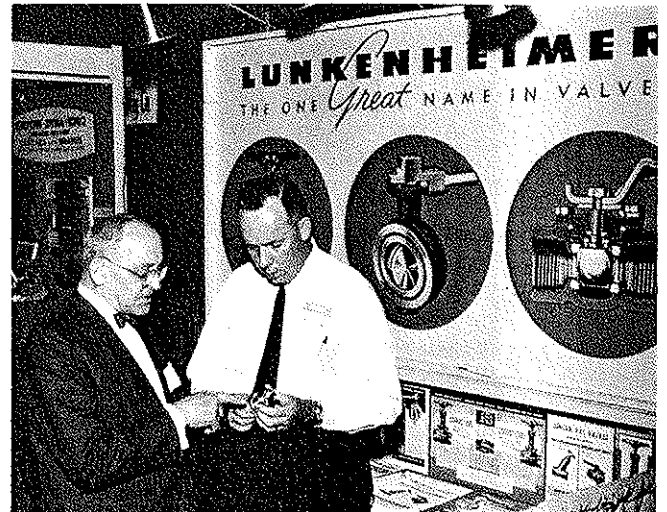
D. L. Davisson (right), of Johnson & Davison, Inc., manufacturers' reps, used demonstration van, show booth to promote Nibco valves. Knapp's Bob Nichols is with him.

Times Photo



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Yale & Towne representatives demonstrate features of hand hoist to show visitor. All booths were open and attended by Knapp guests each day of show from 11 a.m. to 9 p.m.



Times Photo

Lunkenheimer representative Scott W. Ardery (right) explains product to Jerry Bartz, of Chrysler Corporation. There were 20 booths, all the same size: 9 ft by 10 ft.



Times Photo

Shop men as well as purchasing men were invited to the show. Here a group of production people from a local plant get filled in by the Acme Steel representative.



Times Photo

The Manhattan Rubber Division of Raybestos-Manhattan, Inc. showed a color and sound film. In foreground of photo above, Don Fleming of R-M uses brochure to explain.

Chicago. Finally, he settled on May 6 and 7.

There was no formal budget for the show. Not having had one for years, Price felt he didn't have adequate information for determining the finances in advance. "We decided we would have to spend whatever money it took to put on the show," Price said. "Next time we will have a better idea for a budget."

Knapp's industrial mailing list contains 900 names. Four mailings were made to it, starting a month before the event and spaced a week apart. The first piece was in formal "engraved invitation" style. The others were more jazzy reminders. And the Knapp salesmen talked it up on all their industrial calls throughout the month.

In addition, two smaller mailings were used. Price sent a personal letter of invitation to officers and selected members of various service clubs. There was also an invitation to about 30 prime customers for their kitchen products.

Registration at the show was handled by Knapp employees. As they arrived, the guests were registered and given a kit of anniversary souvenirs. Each guest filled out a card with name, address and company. From this the typist copied his name onto an identification badge. Badges were in three colors: red for Knapp personnel, blue for exhibitors, and green for guests. The registration cards were later used for the door prize drawings and, at the end of the show, for a tally of guests.

Each guest received a copy of Knapp Supply's 90th Anniversary Brochure. The eight page booklet contains a history of the company, pictures and information of its present officers and personnel, and a listing of the company's featured lines. In addition, guests were given anniversary souvenir items, all imprinted with the company's name; such things as a plastic letter opener with magnifying glass on one end, matches, lead pencils, and a small memo pad. Total registration was 235.

Show Features

A section of the warehouse had been cleared to make room for an exhibit area, where 20 Knapp suppliers had booths — all the same size, 9 ft. x 10 ft. Out of over 100 manufacturers from whom the company buys, only 20 were invited to display. When asked why, and on what basis the choice was made, Price said, "We selected in two ways. We wanted our customers to see some of our very technical lines and also to see some new lines. Over the years we have been known primarily to local industry as pipe, valve and fittings distributors. We wanted to show the extent of our other industrial lines, particularly in power transmission."

Food was served continually from 11 am to 9 pm in a 20 x 30 ft. tent which cost \$40 to rent. The menu was cold cuts, various salads, a relish tray, coffee, soft drinks, and beer (from 5 till 9 only). A friendly Hoosier-type atmosphere prevailed throughout the show.

Two drawings were made each evening for the \$230 worth of door prizes. The first night two transistor radios and two dozen golf balls were given away. The second night two more radios, one dozen golf balls, and the top prize, a portable TV, were given.

"Several manufacturers offered to provide the door prizes," says Price. "However, we didn't want any of our suppliers to feel we were playing any favorites, so we decided to buy the prizes ourselves."

Price feels the show was a definite success. So that all buying interest could be recorded and followed up, the factory people manning the booths were supplied memo forms with carbons. Not only were many leads developed for later follow-up; some sales were actually made at the show; and all visitors left with a better

understanding of the extent of Knapp's inventory and service in industrial products.

"You can be sure this won't be our last show. We won't have one every year, that is for sure. But we will have more in the future. We have learned from this one and now have some guidelines," Price said.

Costs For Knapp Show

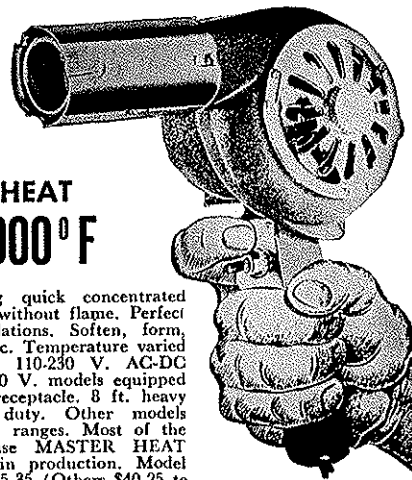
The price tag for the 90th Anniversary Show of Knapp Supply Company was comfortably modest, largely because they were able to use their own facilities. Also, their own people handled everything, except for the food service caterer and members of the Muncie Police Reserve who aided parking.

The actual out-of-pocket expenses were as follows:

Booth material rental	200
Tent rental	40
Promotional items	150
Door prizes	230
Mailings	230
Painted signs	100
P.A. system	25
90th Anniversary brochures	350
Catering service	275
Misc.	75
Overtime help (approx.)	250
TOTAL	\$1925

Actually, the biggest expense was the time of the Knapp Supply management and personnel that went into planning and promoting the event. It would be difficult to estimate the hours they put in — or their cost — or their value in relation to the lasting benefit of the event. □

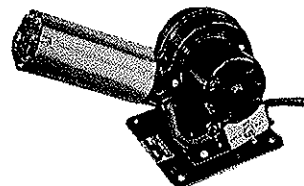
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