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The 2015 inductee into the PVF Hall of Fame is Puget Sound Pipe & Supply. It is led by third- and fourth-generation members of the founder's family. They include

(from left): Scott Lewis, CFO Steven Lewis, Matt Stratiner, Kyle Stratiner, President & CEO Gary Stratiner, Koltin Stratiner and Andy Lewis.

Legendary industrial distributor Puget Sound Pipe & Supply successfully navigates four generations of family leadership

BY MARY JO MARTIN
Editorial Director

At nearly 100 years old, Puget Sound Pipe & Supply is a fixture in the Pacific Northwest, one of the highly respected names in industrial PVF distribution and continues to be owned and led by members of the founding Stratiner family.

They have the benefit of the ex-

perience, long-time leadership and knowledge of President & CEO Gary Stratiner and CFO Steven Lewis, paired with the fresh perspectives and young-gun enthusiasm of their fourth-generation sons, Koltin, Matt and Kyle Stratiner, and Andy and Scott Lewis. All are committed to continuing the legacy of this venerable wholesaler, and exploring new potential avenues for growth.



The Wholesaler is delighted to honor Puget Sound Pipe & Supply as its PVF Hall of Fame inductee for 2015. I recently interviewed these gentlemen, and on the following pages share the story of the past, the present and what they look forward to as the future of Puget Sound.

PVF HALL OF FAME

MJM: You are going to be one of an elite group of PVF wholesalers to reach 100 years old in 2017. Give our readers a little glimpse of the early days of Puget Sound Pipe & Supply — and your family's involvement over the years.

Gary Stratiner: My grandfather, Ire Stratiner, was originally on his way to Alaska, but found a home here in Seattle and started his business buying and selling used pipe, valves and fittings.

My father, Phil Stratiner, had one

older brother who unfortunately passed away at age 17. Phil attended the University of Washington and graduated in mechanical engineering just in time for World War II. He enlisted in Navy Officer Training and spent the last part of the war in the Pacific with the Seabees. When he returned home, Ire literally threw him the keys to the front door and told him the business was his. My grandfather passed away a few years later, and Phil continued to build the business up as a legitimate supplier of

new PVF doing business mostly in the Puget Sound area. His main lines were US Steel, Jones & Laughlin Steel, Stockham, Ladish and Jenkins Valve and Milwaukee Marine Valves.

I only had one sibling, my older

MJM: Tell us a little about your dad and his way of doing business?

Gary: Phil was content to build his business regionally, concentrating on the very lucrative Pacific Northwest Marine Industry and doing most of the sales work

“We give all of our employees as much responsibility as possible. The saying around here is ‘We give everyone a lot of rope and you can either run with it or hang yourself.’”

— Gary Stratiner

PVF Hall of Fame inductees — past and present

Manufacturer

Manufacturer	Inductee	Year
Anvil International.....	Tom Fish	2009
Bonney Forge.....	John Leone	2002
Conbraco.....	Carl Mosack	2002
Crane.....	Shel Evans	2004
Fisher Controls.....	Terry Buzbee	2007
Jamesbury.....	Howard Freeman	2002
Keystone.....	Galen Brown	2002
Legend Valve.....	David Hickman	2008
Milwaukee Valve.....	Herschel Seder	2002
Mueller Industries.....	Bill O'Hagan	2005
Nibco Inc.....	Lee Martin	2002
Powell Valve.....	Randy Cowart	2009
PVF Roundtable.....	Sidney Westbrook	2006
VMA.....	Morris Beschloss	2002
Velan, Inc.....	Karel Velan	2002
Victaulic.....	Gary Moore	2007
Watts Industries.....	Tim Horne	2004
Weldbend.....	James Coulas Sr.	2002
Welding Outlets Inc.....	Sheryl Michalak	2013

Distributor

Distributor	Inductee	Year
Affiliated Distributors.....	William Weisberg	2006
All-Tex Pipe & Supply.....	Jill Brock Hurd	2007
Bergen Industrial Supply.....	James LaPorte	2003
Chicago Tube & Iron.....	Donald R. McNeeley	2003
Collins Pipe & Supply.....	Brian Tuohy	2013
Columbia Pipe & Supply.....	William Arenberg	2005
Consumers Pipe & Supply.....	Michael Abeling	2008
Davidson Pipe Supply.....	Peter Davidson	2003
Eastern Industrial Supplies Inc.....	Kip Miller	2010
Ferguson Commercial & Industrial.....	Rob Braig	2006
Frischkorn.....	Jack Clark	2003
F.W. Webb.....	John Pope	2005
Independent Pipe & Supply.....	Ed Nierman	2003
JABO Supply.....	Jack Bazemore	2012
Kelly Pipe Co. LLC.....	Earle Cohen	2003
Lehman Pipe & Plumbing Supply.....	Dennis Lehman	2014
Liberty Equipment.....	Larry Senescu	2003
Macomb Pipe & Supply.....	Bill McGivern	2004
McJunkin.....	Bernie Wehrle	2003
MKS Pipe Valve & Fittings.....	Pat Adams	2009
National Oilwell Varco.....	Robert Workman	2008
Paramount Supply.....	Ken Grothe	2011
Piping & Equipment Inc.....	Gary Cartright	2003
Porter Pipe & Supply.....	James Porter	2007
Puget Sound Pipe & Supply.....	Gary Stratiner	2015
Red Man Pipe & Supply.....	Lew Ketchum	2003
USFlow.....	Rick Waters	2003
Wilson Supply.....	Jim Owsley	2004

sister Jan. A few years after I came to work full time after graduating from the University of Washington Business School in 1973, we brought in Jan's husband, Steve Lewis, to take over our accounting and finance responsibilities. He replaced a gentleman named Art Furtwangler who had been with my grandfather and — if I remember correctly — worked for us for close to 60 years.

Steve has been my partner from nearly the beginning. I might hold the title of President/CEO, but we are equal shareholders and have a policy that if either of us feels strongly about something, we find a way to get it done. Steve oversees the financial and computer aspects, and I oversee sales, purchasing and operations.

himself. For years he only had one other outside salesman and one inside salesman besides himself. When I came to work full time in 1973, there were two outside and four inside sales people and two-thirds of all our sales were with Todd Shipyards, Lockheed Shipbuilding and Tacoma Boat. They were all building big Navy ships at the time and just that business alone kept them busy. He also had close relationships with the local mechanical contractors.

MJM: What are some of your favorite memories growing up in the business?

Gary: I could fill a book with memories from the business — after all, it has been my life for so many years. I learned the business



“We do everything in our power to make sure the correct material shows up where it is needed, with all of the documentation in order and the material being fit for immediate use,” says Koltin Stratiner.

When I took on the role of President in 1973, we had one location in Seattle with 15 employees and annual sales of \$4 to \$5 million. Today, our 150 employees at 10 operations generate sales close to \$100 million.

My father Phil is now 92 years old, and is Chairman of the Board.

as a young man from industry legends such as Hershel Seder of Milwaukee Valve, John Leone of Bonney Forge, Ceace Jones from J & L Steel and Don Ryan of Stockham Valve and Fitting. They all had close personal relationships with my father and whenever they would visit, they would make sure to give me a “lesson or

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two.” There were a dozen more at least who taught me a lot over the years.

And now, it is a pleasure to come to work every day and see the progress the boys are making. I probably shouldn’t say it, but they are capable today of running my end of the business by themselves — although I still remind them they need me around!

Koltin: I have grown up hearing so many great stories — things like the goats my Great-grandpa used to have out in the pipe yard to keep the grass “cut,” and the auctions for the surplus material after the wars when they started to dismantle the lib-

erty ships.

I remember going to visit my dad for lunch at the old building in the SODO district of Seattle. My grandfather and father used to share a large office with a desk at either end of it. The employees who were there at the time — many of whom are still with us, or were with us when I started full time but have since retired — used to take us out in the warehouse and show us around.

MJM: Please share some of the key factors that helped you learn the business?

Matt: First, it was working in the warehouse a couple



Ire Stratiner began Puget Sound Pipe & Supply in Seattle buying and selling used pipe, valves and fittings. Here he stands outside the business with a pair goats he kept to cut the grass in the pipe yard.

of weeks each summer growing up, learning the product. The second — and probably the most important — is to take advantage of the years and years of experience available to me in all of our employees. My first few years full time, I tried to soak in as much as possible, listening to my father, our managers and other employees who have probably forgotten more in their time than

I have even learned. Third, it’s to sometimes just go for it. You can’t sit around and fret about what you are going to do all the time. Everyone makes mistakes, but we have always been taught that the

second time. It is impossible to learn, and to grow, without making mistakes, so it was always nice to know that it is OK to take a course of action even if it might be the wrong one.

That does not mean that he was not always there — as he still is — looking over our shoulder trying to keep us from making the mistakes he has made. We always hear from him, my uncle and my grandfather that there will be slow years, that we will have to work harder than anyone else in the company and stay ahead of issues or we will get caught up in it.

The other important lesson that my father — and for that matter Jerry Hendricks and Pat Manning — taught all of us, is the importance of relationships. We were



A long way from the days when goats kept the grass down in its pipe yard, Puget Sound now operates eight warehouses

important thing is to learn from those mistakes so as to not make them again in the future. I have had to be a little more political at times, rather than the very blunt person I am. Learning what my flaws are and trying to correct them have led to some great lessons for me, to say the least.

MJM: Talk about some of the lessons your dad has taught you both personally and professionally?

Koltin: My father has always expected as much of us — if not more — than he has expected from everyone else. He actually cut up my credit card in front of half the office once right after I had graduated from college — still a funny story to this day that he denies ever happened! He always expected my cousins, brothers and me to take responsibility for our actions. He told us that we are going to make mistakes, but that we needed to acknowledge them, learn from them, and make sure we did not make them a

taught that it is important that everyone always feel like they are working together, with everyone winning. As soon as someone isn’t able to make money off of the



business relationship, if one side pushes too far, the whole structure will come down.

Phil Stratiner, son of company founder Ire, received the keys to the firm following his discharge from the Navy after WWII. He now serves as Chairman of the Board at age 92.

Matt: I totally agree. People will always buy from who they want to in the end. We work with some great people and companies across the U.S. and some other parts of the world. Without those relationships, we wouldn’t be able to do most of the things we have done and grow the business the

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way we have. I talk to vendors every day.

Not just about orders I have, or problems, or a question regarding a certain product, but also about what the market is doing and what they see for the coming months, and years. As we begin to go into new products, I rely on my vendors to speed along my education and help me better understand the ins and outs of what I am buying. We also rely on our relationships with our vendors in order to ensure that we have what we need when we need it. Problems are going to happen no matter what you try to do to avoid them, and it's our relationships with our vendors that always allow us to get together to find solutions to those problems.

MJM: Give us an overhead view of Puget Sound today?

Gary: We have eight warehouses and two sales offices:

- Kent, Wash. — Located just south of Seattle, this serves as

our Corporate Headquarters and main Distribution Center for all facilities. Manager is Dave Mahlum.

- Seattle — This facility is located within the McKinstry Co business complex and primarily serves their needs. McKinstry is one of the largest mechanical contractors on the West Coast and pioneered Design/Build/Maintain, and we have a just in time inventory on hand for their operations 24/7. Manager is Sean Nadeau.

- Kelso, Wash. — Services the Pulp and Paper industry and some very large contractors and fabricators in Southwest Washington. Manager is Rich Roberts.

- Vancouver, Wash. — Located just across the Columbia River from Portland, services southwestern Washington and all of our business in the State of Oregon. They also help manage most of our import pipe that comes into the Port of Vancouver. Manager is Eric Heilbrun.

- Burlington, Wash. — This is our newest branch, and is in the

northern Puget Sound Region. They service all our business in that area including all of the Puget Sound refineries. Manager is Tim Chapman.

- Kennewick, Wash. — Services central and eastern Washington for us and is a combination of all our commercial/industrial business, ag business and government NQA-1 business out of the Hanford Nuclear Reservation. Manager is Mark Chindivat.

- Anchorage, Alaska — Traditionally, this location was 100% petrochemical, but in the last five years has slowly built up their commercial/industrial business as



well. Manager overseeing all Alaska operations is Scott English.

- Kenai, Alaska — Services the Cook Inlet petrochemical business for us.

- Los Angeles sales office — Headed up by long-time employee Pat Manning .

- Houston sales office — Opened in 2014, it is led by long time industry salesman Minto Mann.

All of the Pacific Northwest locations and managers report

to Executive VP Steve Weber, my right-hand man. The Alaska operations have always reported directly to myself, but in the last few years, my son Koltin has taken on that role.

MJM: Do you feel any pressure as the new generation carrying on the legacy at Puget Sound?

Andy: There is a lot of responsibility to carry on our 98-year legacy. With 150 employees counting on this company remaining successful, we have an obligation to carry on the same values and keep moving forward and growing. Moving forward into

the future I am extremely grateful to have a great relationship with my cousins and brother and we

share a vision on where we would like to see the company grow and how to get there together. I also feel a responsibility to keep the company for my two kids to become involved in if they choose to in the future

Matt: We all love what we do, and fortunately we all are pretty good at the parts of the business we have ended up in. It also helps that we usually all see pretty eye to eye on things, at least after a few minutes of discussions! We also have been very lucky to get great people around us, to help guide us in the direction we want to go in the future.

MJM: What do you feel have been some of your best accomplishments?

Gary: I try my best to let everyone do their jobs. We give all of our employees as much responsibility as possible. The saying around here is "We give everyone a lot of rope and you can either run with it or hang yourself." I joke around and tell everyone I just try to stay out of their way, but they know I am around watching and helping out. I delegate well and keep my eye on as much as possible so I can help out by sharing my two cents when needed. Today's electronic world makes that easy. I check all the sale orders and purchase orders placed the day before so I know what's going on, but we have a very, very good group of managers and along with the boys, they are all very capable. I have been damn lucky to have been able to bring Steve Weber, Pat Manning and Jerry Hendriks into the company over



Standing in front of a portrait of Puget Sound founder Ire Stratiner are: Koltin Stratiner, Andy Lewis, Kyle Stratiner, Scott Lewis and Matt Stratiner; seated are CFO Steven Lewis and CEO Gary Stratiner.

the years. All three have been key contributors to our growth and I would not have been successful without them. Sometimes it pays to be lucky rather than good!

Matt: As much as knowing the product and being able to analyze

eral rule is that we sell anything inside the walls, and even that is sometimes not where it ends.

MJM: *I'm sure you've had numerous offers to acquire your company. Why did you decide to keep it family*

waukee Valve and Allied Group to our buying group (Affiliated Distributors), and I think they would all tell you it has been very worthwhile and profitable.

Add to that the fact that we have had close personal relation-

to describe how crucial those relationships are. I am constantly surprised to hear stories from some of our customers, especially at the EPC level, about when they first met my father or Pat Manning 25 years ago. It says a lot about our relationships with them that they still look to Puget for their material. At the same time, getting the opportunity to travel to our customer's offices and meet the newer generation as well has been a lot of fun. I cannot wait to see where we all end up 20 years from now, but I can guarantee you it will be somewhere in the industry. We always joke that once we get into it, it is impossible to get out.

MJM: How have your customers' expectations changed over the years, and how has Puget Sound adapted to those changing needs/wants?

Koltin: Even in the past six years since I have come on full time, our customers have started demanding more and more on the documentation side; including testing procedures, specification review (and everyone has their own specifications) along with drawings, MTRs, and testing results. As a result, we have had to continue to grow our quality department and put personnel in charge of what we call the "documentation packages" which usually have to be uploaded as well, and tracked with extreme care to make sure hold points are not skipped, or not released when allowed, during production of materials. Even on non-project work, we are starting to see more and



At right is Dave Mahlum, manager of Puget Sound's Kent, Wash., corporate headquarters, with Executive VP Steve Weber, Gary Stratiner's "right hand man."

what we need and when is essential to my job, managing and dealing with people is even more important. Talking with vendors every day to get the best prices, as well as finding out what is going on in the market place is very important, and often times I am the first point of contact for many of our vendors. In other cases, I am the one who has the relationships with the principles at may of our vendors, so when something needs to get run up the flag pole, that often is my responsibility.

When I started in the Purchasing Department in 2008, we were almost exclusively stocking and selling carbon steel. My first big project was to take the lead on stainless steel, learning that product from the ground up. Today 40% of our inventory is SS, and the fact that it was closer to .5% back when I started just shows how far we have come.

Since then, with the help of great salespeople and managers who have been able to sell the product, we now stock and sell copper tube and fittings, PVC fittings and pipe, stainless steel fittings, flanges pipe, and tube, as well as many other items that my father swore we would never go into. We tell people that the gen-

owned and led?

Gary: We get calls at least once a week, and some of the offers — if we even let it get that far — have been very generous. But the family has decided to leave that decision up to the next generation and they have emphatically told us they are not interested the few times we put something in front of them. My father let Steve and me have the opportunity to grow the business and as long as the boys want to do the same, we will give them the same opportunity.

MJM: *Vendors play a key role in any distributor's success. Talk about those long relationships you've had.*

Gary: We wouldn't be where we are today without the backing, support and protection of our key vendors, and every day we work to push more business their way. They know that we have a quality program that we believe is head and shoulders above everyone else in the distribution business, and we actually go to all of our vendor's plants and facilities around the globe to help them with their quality process. We do everything in our power to make it a win, win situation with them. We have also helped bring some of those key vendors, such as Mil-

ships with people like the Seder Family of Milwaukee Valve — Johnny was in my wedding — and the Leone Family of Bonney Forge, which over the years have made us feel like we are part of their family. Today the boys are adding to those relationships with key vendors such as the Lipps of Merit Brass, the Coulas family of Weldbend, the Brevis of OMB Valve, the Mosacks of Apollo, the Galperti family and many more.

MJM: *Loyalty and relationships are also critical when it comes to customers. In such a competitive market, how do you manage those relationships?*

Gary: Loyalty is a two-way street and we try to show that to each and every customer. I can't speak for them, but I think the growth in our sales and ability to win and keep business is a good indication of our ability to get that point across.

Koltin: There are no words

Major lines

- Milwaukee Valve
- Apollo Valve
- Forum Energy Group (PBV & DSI)
- Bonney Forge
- OMB
- Victaullic
- Viega
- Galperti
- Allied Group
- Weldbend
- Tubos Reunidos
- Global Group
- Merit Brass
- Anvil
- AB&I
- Penn Machine
- Phoenix Forge
- Wheatland Tube
- Ipsco
- Cambridge Lee
- Texas Pipe
- Keckley
- Smith Cooper/ Sharpe Valves

more customers require MTRs with each shipment. Of course, everything in PSP's warehouse that is a traceable item has an MTR in our database; so for us, it is not a large burden.

Matt: We also do shop work

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on pipe. Cutting, threading, beveling and grooving. Many of our customers rely on us doing this prep work for them so their guys in the field can concentrate on other things.

to this project were unbelievable, some of the most technically complicated large OD API 6A valves ever produced worldwide. The team effort between Exxon, Worley Parsons, Fluor, PSP and OMB employees that was required

of the family and do all in our power to convey that to them. We have very little turnover in our management and sales staffs with many employees that have been with us over 30 years, some 40 years. It is very gratifying.

long as I can remember, and many of them have watched my brothers and me grow up. We try and foster a close relationship with all of our employees, old or new, and we stress that we always have an open door policy. We want them all to know that they should feel comfortable coming to us with anything, whether it be business related or personal.



Puget Sound carries 23 major lines in its warehouses. "We tell people that the general rule is that we sell anything inside the walls, and even that is sometimes not where it ends," says Matt Stratiner.



MJM: Do you engage in electronic commerce with your suppliers and/or customers? If so, how has that improved your processes?

Andy: We utilize EDI for some larger customers to bring contract price items into our system to be ordered. Our online MTR system and retrieval is another technology our customers are using in order to get electronic copies of their reports by sales order or PO #

MJM: What are some of the major projects you've been involved with?

Koltin: We have been working on the Bechtel National, Waste Treatment facility in Hanford, Washington since 2003, and still continue to supply them with NQA-I and commercial material. They were our first major nuclear project, and the reason that we developed the nuclear program in 2003.

We recently received the valve contract as well for the Point Thomson project (Exxon) in Alaska. It was our first time working with OMB out of Italy on a major project, and has helped cement not only a working relationship with Exxon Mobile, but also created a very strong relationship between OMB and PSP. The valves that were created and supplied

have made all of us stronger, and taught all of us lessons that we will incorporate into major project work in the future.

MJM: How have you cultivated a sense of passion among them?

Gary: It all starts with our employees. They are the best of the best. We treat them like part

of the family and do all in our power to convey that to them. We have very little turnover in our management and sales staffs with many employees that have been with us over 30 years, some 40 years. It is very gratifying.

Matt: An amazing stat is that of the four guys pulling orders in the warehouse and the one person in working in our shop when I started here at 13, all of us are still with the company.

So many of our employees have been with us for so many years, that I have known them as long as

Koltin: We look at Puget as one large family, and I think the longevity of our employees is a testament to how strong that family is. Especially for my cousins, brothers and I, who have counted on these employees to train us over the years and teach us much of what we know today.

In addition, Scott English who is currently managing our Alaska operations does a great job. We will spend hours on the phone together some days, or other weeks barely talk, but the open lines of communication and my family's ability to count on him in that market allows us to operate the way we do.

Ultimately, it is our employees that make us such a strong company. What's that old idiom, a leader is only as strong as the people around him, and that isn't more true than at Puget Sound Pipe & Supply. We have been extremely lucky over the years to have great managers who have had an eye for talent and have been able to foster and grow that talent into great individuals all across our company. They care about the company like they're family; that's what keeps customers coming back to us and makes employees stick around for years and years.

MJM: Talk about the flexibility a company like yours must have when dealing with fluctuating metals prices on materials?

Gary: It's not easy. I watch the metal prices daily to gauge what our moves should be in regards to purchasing and pricing. I have CNBC on in my office pretty much all day every day — mostly on mute — so I can stay up on



"We also do shop work on pipe. Cutting, threading, beveling and grooving. Many of our customers rely on us doing this prep work for them."
— Matt Stratiner

"With the help of great salespeople and managers who have been able to sell the product, we now stock and sell copper tube and fittings, PVC fittings and pipe, stainless steel fittings, flanges pipe, and tube, as well as many other items that my father swore we would never go into," says Matt Stratiner.

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How they got started

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• Gary Stratiner, President & CEO

I started working in the warehouse during summer vacation when I was 13 years old, as did all of the kids. While I was going to college, I would come into the office and work when my schedule allowed.

After graduation, I worked in inside sales and also did most of the purchasing. When the decision was made to build the Trans Alaska Pipeline, and I realized everything would flow through Seattle, I set my sights on chasing that business. My father told me I was wasting my time going to California and calling on all the engineering companies doing the purchasing and construction. But I hit it off with all the young buyers, and with the help of employees Pat Manning and Jerry Hendriks, the rest is history. Today we hold all the PVF contracts for all the major and most minor Alaska Oil companies and refineries and Alyeska Pipeline Service, servicing them from warehouses in Anchorage and Kenai.

I never really thought of doing anything else. There was no pressure from my parents, but I knew it was a great business, and that it was mine if I wanted it. I still get up every day and look forward to going to the office. Hopefully all of the boys feel the same way. I've always told them that if they don't enjoy what they are doing and look forward to going to work every day, they should do something else.

• Steven Lewis, CFO

I am married to Janice Stratiner Lewis; brother-in-law to Gary and Cindy Stratiner, uncle of Matt, Koltin and Kyle Stratiner; and father of Andy and Scott Lewis.

I graduated from the University of Washington in Accounting in 1970 and the University Of Southern California School Of Law in 1973. Prior to coming to work at Puget I spent five years in the tax department of Arthur Andersen's Seattle office. During that time I became a CPA and a member of the Washington State Bar.

After practically growing up in the Stratiner household from the time I was 12 or 13, I have been treated as an "almost" son by Phil and Josie. They were my second set of parents.

Phil has been and continues to be provider, teacher and mentor to everyone in the family. He provided the atmosphere that has enabled the family to build a business that is becoming a force in the industry. Building on that foundation, Gary Stratiner has provided the vision, direction, drive and management style that has enabled us to grow and made it a fun place to come to work. We strive every day to give customers what they want, when they want it. It is all about service, including value added services such as electronic MTR retrieval and a comprehensive Quality Program and Department.

I feel truly grateful to have had the opportunity to contribute to the success of our family business. It is also most gratifying to see the fourth generation already taking active leadership roles and continuing the tradition.

• Koltin Stratiner, Corporate QA Manager

We all grew up in the business. I spent my summers out in the warehouse starting around the age of 13. I think I needed money for something and my dad told me that I would have to come work for it. I sat inside and scanned MTR's into the computer system for two weeks. After that I was out in the warehouse during the summers from school.

My older brother was out there, and my cousin, and a great group of other guys who are still all with us

today. We had an awesome time together. I learned how to drive a forklift long before I was able to drive a car. There was no better way to learn the product though, and the time we spent out there is invaluable.

I attended school down in LA at the University of Southern California, and would work back home in Seattle during the summer. The summer before my junior year, I was tasked with doing the rewrite on our NQA-1 nuclear manual to update it from the 1989 edition to a new 2000 version at the behest of the Waste Treatment Project by Bechtel National in the Tri Cities. It was my first time really entering the quality side of the business and I took an immediate liking to it. I know, it is kind of sick and twisted because no one should ever enjoy doing a manual rewrite and burring themselves in specifications and procedures, but I have always found them interesting.

From there on out I continued working the quality department, even during the school year. Pat Manning, who used to manage our California branches, and then took over our quality department and project sales, has always been a mentor to me. I spent a lot of time with him in Los Angeles learning about the quality systems, but most importantly how Quality can be used as a sales tool.

I have since taken over many of Pat's roles on both the quality and sales side. My current role is "Corporate QA Manager," but I am also very heavily involved in overseeing the sales for special projects. They actually have gone hand in hand, as the majority of the projects have their own sets of engineering and quality requirements that must be incorporated into bids and execution these days.

At one point I wanted to be an architect, at another a lawyer, but none of them as seriously as I wanted to work with my family. As I worked my way into different departments at Puget Sound, I found a love of not only PVF, but also the industry as a whole. I am a businessman at heart, and the construction and energy sectors are truly fascinating places to work. It is a truly global industry, and by the time I graduated from USC I had no questions about what I wanted to do with my life.

• Matt Stratiner, Corporate Purchasing Manager

As most in our family did, I started in the warehouse at 13; there must be child labor laws against that or something — kidding! Some of my favorite memories were the summers spent pulling orders and goofing around with the guys out in the warehouse, all of whom still work for us in one capacity or another.

There has to be a good balance between work and play, and we have always known how to have a good time while maintaining a professional atmosphere. Our company golf tournaments each year, both in Alaska in the Seattle area, have become great places for our employees, customers and vendors to all get the chance to know each other a little better and are events I look forward to every year.

We always try to promote from within and that means starting at the bottom — in the warehouse. It is the best place for anyone in the business to get to learn the product that we deal with on a daily business. That was no different for me, my brothers, and cousins. I also had the chance to work on the inside sales desk for just long enough to learn that it wasn't for me. However, it did give me a good appreciation of what our sales people go through everyday dealing with customers. I happen to be a very blunt person, so often times I didn't have enough tact to maneuver my

way through some situations that arrived on the sales desk. It does, though, allow me to greatly enjoy the purchasing side of the business, which is what I have been doing since about 2008. I've learned the ins and outs from my father and our current Corporate Inventory Manager Kevin Collier as I've worked my way up.

It's funny to think that I have known I want to go into the family business for as long as I can remember.

That just isn't the case very often with family owned businesses where the next generation wants to come into the office. The fact that both of my brothers and both of my cousins are all at the same company is simply unheard of.

It also made going to college a lot of fun, knowing I wanted to go into the purchasing side of the business. I was able to cater my Business Degree around that knowledge and specifically take classes that would apply to what I wanted to do; lots of Management Courses, Operations Management Courses, and Finance. I have had other odd jobs over the years, and although I got great experience from them all, none of them ever appealed to me in the same way that going to work with my family selling PVF did.

• Andy Lewis, Operations Manager

Some of my favorite memories were coming in to the office with my father on the weekends while he got caught up. I also enjoyed working summers in the warehouse as a teenager. Along the way, I've worked in the Warehouse, accounting, marketing, sales, IT and Operations.

This was the furthest thing from what I wanted out of high school, I had other interests in college, but when I started working her full time I was able to find a passion here at Puget Sound Pipe and it became important to me to continue my family's success and help to contribute to the success so it is available to my two kids if they choose to when they get older. In that process I fell in love with the business and would never change a thing.

• Scott Lewis, Inside Sales

Like my brother Andy and my cousins, I grew up working in the warehouse during the summers while I was in school. About 15 years ago, I started working inside sales and that is where I am today. For me it has been a real joy working with my family and also many of the longtime employees, many of whom have known me since I was just a little guy.

• Kyle Stratiner, Purchasing

I started out in the warehouse working a few days a week during summer vacations and sometimes during my other long breaks. I went to the University of Denver so unfortunately I wasn't around for most of the year to work part time but when I was in town (summer vacation and Winter break) I worked as much as possible — mostly out in the warehouse but around my senior year I was moved inside to try out the sales desk. Since graduation I have been helping out my oldest brother Matt in our Purchasing Department.

I've sort of always known this was the career for me. There was never any pressure that we had to go into the business and we definitely were not forced. And growing up I was always open to checking something else out. It wasn't really until I was at college when I started realize how lucky I was. I would be sitting in class or a giant auditorium listening to presentation of what to expect from the real world and it really hit me how unique our industry is and how there really wasn't anywhere else I'd rather be. 🌐

PVF HALL OF FAME

what is going on around the world that will affect our business. We are fortunate in that we can act and make decisions immediately, and not have to work it through a corporate hierarchy. Matt, our Corporate Purchasing Manager, has picked up on doing the same, so these decisions don't have to rely solely on my observations.

Matt: Carbon steel has generally not had the volatility that other metals have had over the last few years. Although we all saw what happened when the carbon bubble burst back in 2007/2008. Lucky my dad had been telling us it was a bubble for a year and a half, so as the prices continued to skyrocket, we had been very conser-



Neil Weinstein is controller for Puget Sound.

vative in what we had been buying. Cutting down on indent orders that don't show up for three to five months and so lowering our exposure on pricing. Everyone lost money on high priced material that suddenly plummeted, but since we had only a small amount of material in stock at the highest prices, and nothing coming into the docks



three to five months after the fact at those prices, we fared better than most. Stainless steel and copper have been much more volatile, and I have learned to check the price of copper and the price of nickel every day. We all want to buy at the lowest cost possible and not when it is super high, but it's very hard to determine where those peaks and valleys are going to be. By looking at historical numbers, it's possible to see what are very high prices and what are very low prices, so we try and load when it is low, but none of us have

a crystal ball to tell us what pricing is going to do. As long as we are careful, and don't place too many offshore orders when the pricing is very high, then we shouldn't get hurt too bad. Copper is the trickiest by far, as it can be extremely volatile. Even harder for us is that our copper sales have grown exponentially over the past four years, so we never seem to have enough in stock. Since it all comes in very quickly we try and place more orders of a smaller quantity to ensure that we have the most accurate price available. Even if we don't hit the troughs exactly, and as long as we don't buy too much quantity at the peaks, everything has a tendency to average itself out in the end.

MJM: You've been very active with industry organizations. Give us a look at some that you belong to, and the volunteer leader roles you've taken on? Why has that been important to you?

Gary: You know I hate talking about myself. I am currently serving my second stint on the ASA IPD Board and help write the Carbon Steel Pipe report we publish quarterly. I also have served on a few different leadership positions with AD, including a Network Chairman, serving on the Product Committee and now on the PVF Board.

MJM: How has your membership in AD benefited your business?

Gary: It has been tremendous! Besides the financial contributions, I have met so many leaders from the best Independent PVF Distributors in the country. I've learned so much from leaders like Ernie Coutermarsh, Gary

Cartwright, Dennis Niver, Jeffrey Beale, Gary Jackson, Pat Adams, Tim Arenberg. I could go on and on. And of course the fearless leader of AD, Bill Weisberg.

Matt: Firstly it allows us to get on the same playing field as the big boys, who buy way more material than we do. If not for the fact that we essentially buy as a group, there would be no reason for manufacturers and master distributors to give us the same prices, discounts and rebates they do the larger conglomerates. Secondly, it gives us the chance to meet with other independent distributors many of whom go through the same problems, di-

lemmas, and scenarios that we do. To have a group that we can run things by and learn what they have done or are doing in similar situations is priceless.

Kyle: As a youth and individual coming up in the business, AD has been extremely influential. These buying groups contain the best of the industry and if you take the time and listen you can learn an exponential amount

customers that we aren't going to do the same. So they rely on us to have the product on the ground when they need it.

Koltin: The quality of the product that we provide, and the level of service, are things that we take great pride in as a family. The options that people have about Puget Sound Pipe, also reflect their opinions of our family, which is something

“We have been extremely lucky over the years to have great managers who have had an eye for talent and have been able to foster and grow that talent into great individuals all across our company. They care about the company like they're family; that's what keeps customers coming back to us and makes employees stick around for years and years.”

— Matt Stratiner

from any single person you come across. I think groups like AD or ASA are essential in the education of the next generation because there really is no better way to learn the tools you'll need to succeed in this industry.

MJM: Give us a look at the economy recently in the Pacific Northwest?

Gary: We have been very fortunate with corporate headquarters like Microsoft, Costco and Amazon along with large employers like Boeing calling this area home. They never went through a slowdown in 2008-2009 and are hiring and spending like crazy. I think we have something like 50 construction cranes dotting our skyline these days with more to come. It bodes well for business through 2016, and we will just have to see after that.

MJM: What are some of the things that you believe makes Puget Sound stand out in the marketplace?

Matt: The fact that we have been able to keep a very large quantity of material on the ground has been very important. I drive my Uncle Steve Lewis, our CFO, nuts sometimes when I place orders with quantities that look to be a year's supply or more, but we have been lucky enough to have sales people who can push that product to the customers and bankers who haven't cut us off! When all of the big names have to show ROI and cut inventory, we can show our

that the larger publically traded companies do not have to worry about. We spend a lot of our working capitol on our quality department. Close to 8% of our work force falls under the quality umbrella, and we physically travel around the world to not only conduct quality audits of our manufacturers, but follow up on production of large orders. Due to the pride we have in the quality of the products we provide, we only align ourselves with manufacturers who take the same pride in the quality of the products they produce. This understanding lends a lot of strength to the relationships between our customers and our vendors, due to the fact that our customers know that if we are recommending a new manufacturer that they are not familiar with, they know we have done our due diligence.

We also do everything in our power to make sure the correct material shows up where it is needed, with all of the documentation in order and the material being fit for immediate use. One of the reasons that our customers will count on Puget Sound Pipe, even if we are not the lowest bidder, is they have learned that they will save money on the backside by not having delays during fabrication and construction. Of course, no company is perfect, but it is how you handle those problems when they arise that counts the most. 🌐