

## Brithinee Electric motors along Colton firm expands its facility and workforce



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Brithinee Electric's recent grand opening of a 20,000-square-foot large motor/generator repair facility has been in the works for at least five years. Growth, expansion and survival takes careful engineering, according to the owners.

"To do an expansion like this, planning had to start in 2004, so we had five years of planning," said Wally Brithinee, co-owner of the Colton-based company. "The plans sat on the desk of a woman in our offices for a while... Then in 2009 the time seemed right to move forward because of the price of construction."

Construction began in late 2009 and was completed in July. The five-year plan also included growing the company's workforce with 30 more employees, but because of the rough economic recovery, Brithinee nixed the hiring and is using existing staff.

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Don and Wally Brithinee are at the center of Brithinee Electric's celebration at the plant in Colton.

The new 20,000-square-foot structure is part of the company's 3.6 acre footprint which encompasses an 18,500-square-foot motor-repair location and a 14,500-square-foot sales office. The new, energy-efficient building will allow Brithinee to repair motors and generators weighing up to 20 tons. The building also houses a new training center for customers who can learn about maintenance, repairs and correct replacement of electric motors.

Since 2000, Brithinee has doubled its workforce and sales have grown steadily. The family-owned and operated firm specializes in remanufacturing industrial electric motors and repairing motors shipped in from states that include Wyoming, Washington, Texas and Oregon. Brithinee is also considered one of the largest sellers of NEMA Premium Efficiency industrial electric motors.

Brithinee also repairs motors in the large windmills that can be found along the Interstate 10, toward the Coachella Valley. Those windmills can produce up to 300 kilowatts each. (That's equivalent to the amount of electricity the average home uses in one month). Wally and his twin brother Don believe that energy efficiency and renewable energy has a bright future despite the sluggish economy. "We began to develop repairs for solar and geothermal energy motors," said Don Brithinee, who co-owns the company with Wally. "We have specific equipment that accommodates the next generation of wind generators; it's a large industry in California... It accounts for a fourth of our total business."



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While the Brithinee brothers have faced challenges, they have managed to grow and have not had to lay off employees. Even with the rising cost of commodities such as copper, Brithinee has been able to absorb the increases and continue growing because of its five-year plan. Today, Don and Wally are drafting a new strategic plan to help them continue expanding and get through the next few years. Meanwhile, they have focused their efforts on relationship-based business and managed to add 200 new customers in the past two years. They plan to continue adding up to \$1 million worth of equipment to their new 20,000-square-foot building. They also hope to develop a relationship with the University of California and provide wireless sensor technology for them. Their goals also include expanding their customer base and continuing to provide services and products for the green movement and for regular electric motor repair and manufacturing of custom motor control centers.

"I think they will become even more relevant and successful as infrastructure needs to be refurbished," said Julie Eaton, DuPont Protection Technologies - Nomex Energy Solutions, North American marketing manager. "Brithinee is really setting itself up."

DuPont collaborated with Brithinee in 2002 and designated the 57-employee manufacturer, its first Motor Repair Alliance Program partner. Based in Wilmington, Del., DuPont provides Brithinee with its Nomex, flame resistant fiber which is used in electric motors. Brithinee also works with Superior Essex and buys magnet wire and other insulating materials from the Atlanta-based supplier.

"We've been their vendor for 20 years," said Mark Lowery, Superior Essex director of sales. "They are very well respected in the industry and it's magnificent - given the jumbled economic conditions right now - what they've accomplished."

The Brithinee brothers were born and reared in Fontana and graduated from Fontana High School. The ambitious brothers went on to earn doctorate degrees in mathematics from UC Riverside at the age of 22 in 1971.

"When we got our doctorates, it was a bad year to get hired as math professors," Don Brithinee recalled.

So the brothers went back to work for their family's business which was founded by their parents Wally and Zora Brithinee in Colton in 1963.

"The challenges of business were more interesting than teaching," Don Brithinee said.

Since then, the brothers haven't looked back into becoming professors and instead grew the family business. However, they have kept up their relationship with UC Riverside and donated more than \$40,000 to the Brithinee Scholarship for returning UCR Alumni Scholars for students in the School of Engineering. The scholarship was established in 1987.

"Wally and Don have done a hell of a job," Lowery of Superior Essex said. "If you could have pride in a customer, Brithinee is it."

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