



Celebrating 140 years of history...





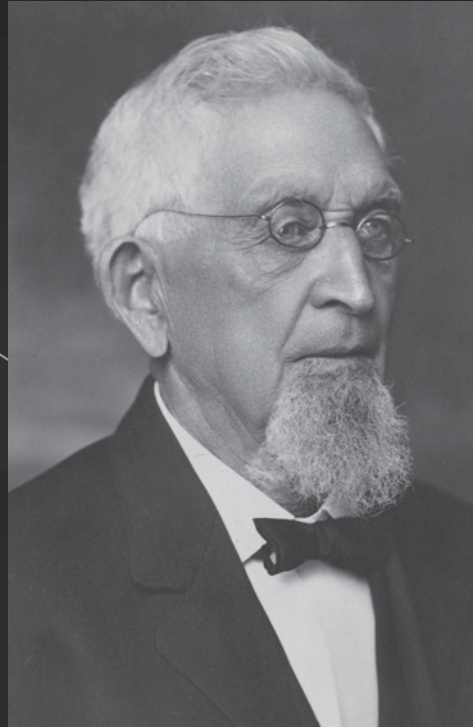
The first 70 years...



An Irish immigrant arrives in America before the nineteenth century and opens a small plumbing and heating shop. Passed on through five generations, the business grows into one of the largest, most successful specialty contracting firms in the United States. The J. F. Ahern Co. story is an “American Dream” realized. And on the surface, the story sounds idealistic. However, the 140 years that brought J. F. Ahern Co. from a tiny storefront to an industry giant were filled with hard work, long hours, and sweat equity. What makes the J. F. Ahern Co. story unique is not merely the Company’s longevity. Instead, the story lies with the people involved in J. F. Ahern Co.’s success – their consistent drive, determination, and willingness to adapt and change while still focusing on business fundamentals. Today, in the same town where David Ahern began living his American Dream in 1880, J. F. Ahern Co. is still making industry history. In this same town and towns throughout the United States, hundreds of field, shop, and office employees report for work every day, continuing to build the Company’s legacy.

David Ahern was born in County Cork, Ireland, in 1832. David was the third child of Thomas and Elizabeth Ahern. As a teenager, David and his family immigrated to the United States in 1849, arriving in Philadelphia. The family traveled around the Pennsylvania area before arriving in Two Rivers, Wisconsin, in the late 1850s. David then met Mary Egan, also an Irish immigrant. The two were married in November 1858 and settled in nearby Fond du Lac, a fledgling city at the southern tip of Lake Winnebago, around 1860.

History indicates that David had a passion for the trades at a very young age. In his youth, David spent ample time learning the ins and outs of plumbing, steam, and gas pipefitting. Upon settling in Fond du Lac, you can imagine how happy David was when he found that his skill set and passion were in high demand in the area. David was building his skills in the trade and quickly showed a knack for customer service while employed at the local gas works. His employer took notice, and in 1867, put David in charge of operations. He held the position until 1879 when the gas works was sold.



David Ahern

**When D. Ahern & Sons opened in 1880:**  
The city of Fond du Lac, Wisconsin contained about 25 telephones.

The local paper still used carrier pigeons to receive news.

Fond du Lac was one of only 598 cities in the entire nation to have piped water systems.

With the introduction of piped water in the late 1800s/early 1900s, a plumbed in washbasin, often set in a floor-standing wooden cabinet or shallow box supported on legs, replaced a porcelain bowl and jug.



The original D. Ahern & Sons shop on Main Street, circa 1880. David is on the far right, and J. F. is second from right.



“Ahern keeps up with the changing times more than I think any other company does. It is a great asset – to know the technology we have is way ahead of our competitors.” - Paula Fox , Billing Specialist

It was also at this time that Louis Pasteur, the famous scientist, uncovered the link between bacteria and disease that would quickly catapult plumbing into a trade that would “ensure personal comfort, save lives and protect the environment.” Around the same time, the invention of the radiator forwarded heating into the “modern” age. Coupled with the invention of the threaded screwed joint a decade earlier that allowed the joint between pipes to bear a similar pressure to the pipe itself, steam and hot water heating became safe enough to install in homes and businesses.

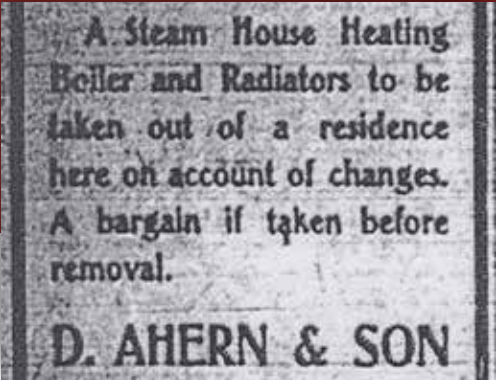
With ever-increasing technological advances in plumbing and steam heating and honing his skills in the public sector, David had no trouble finding work. Azro B. Taylor, a prominent local politician and businessman, soon hired David as a pipe fitter at the only private steam and gas company in the area – a stove manufacturing facility. It was while working for Taylor that David’s sons, particularly William and John Francis (J. F.), showed an interest in learning their father’s trade. David must have been as good a teacher as he was a pipefitter, as his sons’ skills soon matched his own.



The interior of the first store.



An invoice from the 1880s for a customer’s purchase at D. Ahern & Son.



A boiler and radiator newspaper advertisement, circa 1880s.

In 1880, Fond du Lac was growing. At the time, 12,000 people called Fond du Lac home. There was a great deal of progress and growth. In fact, so much growth was occurring that a development boom started and Fond du Lac almost became the capital of Wisconsin, losing to Madison by one vote. Fond du Lac was also one of only 598 cities in the whole nation with piped water systems.

With a family chock-full of passion and keen expertise in their trade, the Ahern family decided to take a big step. In 1880, David, William, and J. F. chose to make it a family business, and D. Ahern & Son was born. Their shop was opened on South Main Street, proudly offering “Sanitary Plumbing, Steam, and Hot Water Heating” services. David’s work was centered primarily on connecting buildings to Fond du Lac’s piped water systems with “estimates furnished upon application,” and of course, “all work guaranteed.”

As Americans continued to connect clean water with the absence of disease, plumbing and piping became vitally important. That being said, in the 1880s flush water toilets didn’t exist. There were high tank water closets, the precursor to the modern toilet, which used a whopping 10 gallons of water per flush! Meanwhile, just down the road - John Kohler created the first cast iron bathtub in 1883 made from an iron horse trough.

Several of these “firsts,” along with a selection of radiators, were proudly displayed in the D. Ahern & Son Main Street showroom. David also advertised for sale sewer pipe, lead and iron pipes, brass goods, and rubber hoses. Out front on the dirt Main St., David’s two-horse wagon was ready to make deliveries of materials and men to serve Fond du Lac’s growing population and desire for clean piped water and heating. He charged \$.32 for 4 pounds of lead pipe, \$.13 for ½ pound of solder, and \$.40 per hour of plumbing labor!

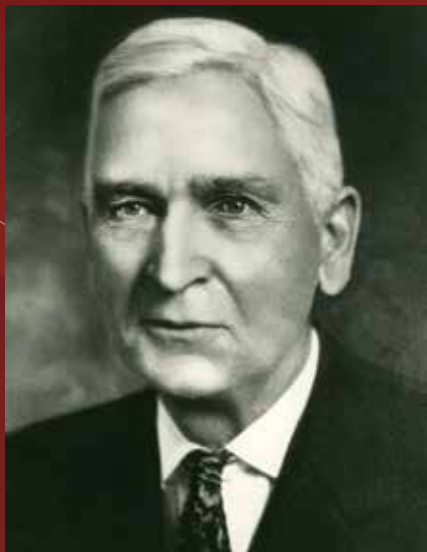


Horse and wagon outside of the Main Street D. Ahern and Son storefront in the early 1900s. Horses were a source of transportation for Ahern for many decades. David is pictured to the left.

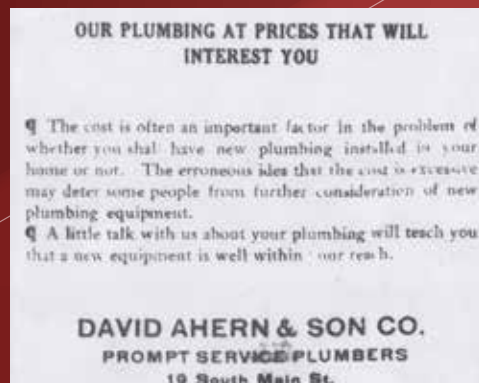
### Reported Sales Revenues

|       |             |       |               |
|-------|-------------|-------|---------------|
| 1925: | \$183,963   | 1975: | \$8,986,917   |
| 1935: | \$40,969    | 1985: | \$25,643,103  |
| 1945: | \$128,990   | 1995: | \$76,162,812  |
| 1955: | \$1,011,136 | 2005: | \$158,532,530 |
| 1965: | \$1,990,317 | 2015: | \$233,982,087 |





J. F. Ahern - second generation. J. F. worked alongside his father David, and brothers William and Edward.



A variety of plumbing advertisements printed in the local newspaper, circa 1900s.

In 1905, after battling a long illness, William Ahern, David’s son, who was heavily involved in the formation of D. Ahern & Son, passed away at the age of 42. However, life and the family business had to forge onward. As David continued to grow older, and with William deceased, the bulk of D. Ahern and Son’s day-to-day operations would rest on J. F.’s shoulders with his brother, Edward, keeping the books.

Just like his father, J. F. was a true entrepreneur with an authentic, customer-focused nature. J. F. entered into a joint venture with another successful local plumbing contractor, J. P. McCoy, in 1906. While D. Ahern & Sons continued to operate under the same name with David at the helm, J. F. and McCoy opened a high-end plumbing showroom at 13 E. First Street in Fond du Lac, under the name Ahern-McCoy Plumbing Co. “The new firm will be prepared to execute promptly and satisfactorily all work entrusted to them in the Plumbing, Steam and Hot Water Heating, Gas Fitting and Drainage line, and will carry a complete line of first-class material for that purpose,” read the newspaper announcement on December 15, 1906.

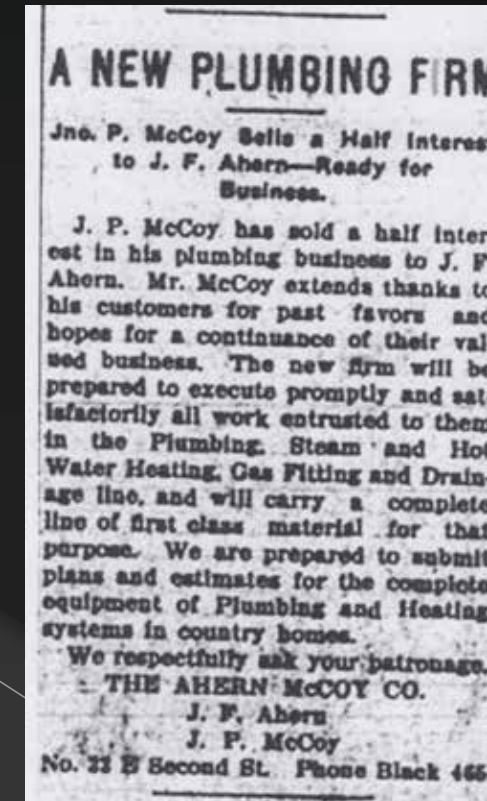
**“Ahern may not be the cheapest, but we have a product and service to offer like no other. Ahern employees take pride in the company, and work hard to design, fab, coordinate and install the very best product possible. If there’s an issue, Ahern will do what it takes to fix it and make things right.”** - Jennifer Beattie, Office Manager

**“Ahern is a very professional organization and expert in our field. The company has many very talented individuals within the organization who always have a commitment to excellence to provide the best value to every customer.”** - Tiffany Guelig, Purchasing Manager

And that’s precisely how the business would operate for more than a decade. J. F.’s business acumen and dedication to his community made him one of the area’s most respected industry members. He was a founding member of the Wisconsin Master Plumbers Association and was elected Sewer Superintendent for the city of Fond du Lac in 1907.



A group photo of the Wisconsin Master Plumbers Association founding members, circa 1894. J. F. Ahern is in the back row, second from left.



Article from the Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter, announcing the Ahern-McCoy partnership, circa 1906.



J. F. continued to grow his businesses, as well as train the third generation, his young sons, John E. (known as “Don”) and Thomas L. who joined the business in the early 1900s. Tragedy would strike the Ahern family once again, this time taking the most rooted member of D. Ahern and Son. In 1915, patriarch and founder of D. Ahern and Son, David Ahern, died suddenly of a heart attack while grocery shopping. He was 82 - a life well lived for that era.



The Ahern-McCoy showroom, circa 1907.



Thomas L. “Tom” Ahern -  
3rd generation



John E. “Don” Ahern -  
3rd generation

## LONG SICKNESS ENDS IN DEATH

Edward F. Ahern Expires At  
Home On Sixth Street;  
Funeral Wednesday

Edward F. Ahern, 54, lifelong resident of this city and for many years engaged in the plumbing business under the name of David Ahern and Son, died early Sunday at the residence, 149 Sixth street, after an illness of three months. The deceased was born in this city, a son of David and Mary Ahern, one of the pioneer families of the community. He entered the plumbing business with his father approximately 30 years ago, the business at that time being located on South Main street. On the death of his father the deceased continued the business, occupying quarters the last few years on East Second street. The business in July, 1930, was absorbed by the John F. Ahern company, ill health forcing the deceased to retire.

Article from the Fond du Lac  
Reporter announcing Edwards’ death.



A group of Ahern employees taking a break,  
circa 1920.

“Ahern has done a great job keeping up with changes. The Company continues to look forward and see changes ahead of when they are coming. I feel this keeps us in front of our competition, and we are the ones making the changes first, which is easier to explain to our customers. Ahern is a leader, not a follower.” – Bobby Fischer, Jr., Project Manager

As proven throughout Ahern’s entire history, the business kept moving forward, and the Ahern family adjusted to their new normal. Both D. Ahern & Son and Ahern-McCoy Plumbing Co. were proving quite successful, but J. F. was not satisfied. He was determined to see how far he could take his business on his own. On May 9, 1921, J. F. dissolved his partnership with J. P. McCoy and opened his own shop at 70 Portland Street aptly named the John F. Ahern Company. He closed the former location of D. Ahern & Son, located on nearby Second Street in Fond du Lac, as his brother Edward’s health failed in 1929. J. F. folded his father’s original business into John F. Ahern Company. Edward would die one year after the dissolution of D. Ahern & Son was complete.

## PLUMBING SHOP GOES ON WHEELS David Ahern & Son Company Introduces Innovation in Fondy - Old Joke Discontinued

David Ahern & Son Co. have purchased a new one ton truck equipped with hundreds of repair parts and all necessary tools to handle repair work. This will mean a great saving to the property owners, as it will save time and money by eliminating the expensive return trips to the shop for material and tools, which has always been a great “joke” in the plumbing business, but nevertheless could not be avoided, as the plumbers could not know the proper material and tools to take with them without a thorough explanation of the work to be done.

This is only one more step toward bigger and better business, and in keeping with the “war-time spirit” of conservation. By this method of handling plumbing and heating repairs the work can be handled more promptly and over a larger territory. The company should be complimented on their timely effort, as this has been a long felt want, and is something entirely new in this locality.



Ahern-McCoy storefront on Portland Street with D. Ahern & Son sign in the window paying homage to his late father’s business, circa 1920s.

A news clipping from the Fond du Lac  
Commonwealth Reporter, July 19, 1918.



In 1921, only 1% of U.S. households had indoor plumbing.

With populations booming, new communities originating, and businesses developing, the 1920s saw a construction boom, especially in large industrial and municipal areas. J. F. took advantage of these opportunities and gradually began to reach beyond the residential market. St. Agnes Hospital in Fond du Lac, one of the largest hospitals in the state at that time, hired Ahern to perform boiler and plumbing installations throughout the 1920s – the beginning of a relationship that continues today. Additionally, Ahern took on work at disposal plants, schools, hotels, and government buildings throughout the state. Its reputation even brought the Company opportunities outside Wisconsin, including the R.E. Olds Tower in Michigan and the Jefferson, Missouri Army barracks. Tom and Don, now well-versed in the industry, were instrumental in the Company’s geographic expansion.

From 1921 to 1929, the Dow Jones Industrial Average increased six-fold. An exploding economy fueled by banks which eagerly extended credit to their customers to purchase items of comfortable convenience, such as automobiles and appliances, began the evolution of a consumer-centered culture that we know today. However, not all that glitters was gold. The single greatest economic collapse in the United States - the Great Depression - began on Thursday, October 24, 1929.

In the 1920s, Fond du Lac County residents owned nearly 3 times as many horses and mules as they did automobiles.



Circa 1930s - St. Agnes Hospital. Ahern and St. Agnes Hospital have enjoyed a relationship lasting over ninety years.

John F. Ahern Company marketing brochure featuring modern mechanicals for the home, circa 1920s.



July 1925 - Retlaw Theatre under construction. Ahern would install the plumbing and heating at the Retlaw, which opened to the public in December 1925 as a venue for vaudeville and movies.



Wisconsin Power & Light Co. Boiler House in Beaver Dam, WI installed by Ahern in 1928.

**“Ahern is a solid contractor with a long history of mechanical capabilities. The team is very driven to perform work safely and on-time with a strong dedication to its customer base.**

- John George, 24 year employee - Retired in 2019



**“An advantage that Ahern has, is the in-house fabrication shops to allow for quick turnaround on fabricated parts. This allowed for aggressive bidding and procurement of jobs.”**

- Bill Drahonovsky, Sr., 10 year employee - Retired in 2004

At the start of the 1930s, amidst the unfolding economic turmoil J. F. “retired” with his sons Don (J.E.) and Tom (T.L.) at the helm after having acquired all of the interest in the John F. Ahern Company from J. F. and his wife, Katherine.

By 1932, the unemployment rate hit 25%, as an estimated 12 million people were out of a job. For those whose job was spared – it wasn’t rare to see individual income drop by 40%. Don and Tom’s business wasn’t spared either - having to lay off more than half of their 20 employees. Sensible reinvestment and savings by their father J. F. from the 1920s were able to help them through the Great Depression, proving that a prudent mechanical contractor plans to weather the inevitable ups and downs of construction. By 1935, Don and Tom had gained back their employees averaging between 15 and 57 employees throughout the year, but sales were \$41,000 - less than 25 percent of sales ten years earlier.

| CITY OF FOND DU LAC, WIS. OFFICE OF CITY TREASURER   |  |              |     |     |      |        |        |         |       |
|--|--|--------------|-----|-----|------|--------|--------|---------|-------|
| RECEIPT FOR REAL-ESTATE TAXES AND SPECIAL ASSESSMENTS  |  |              |     |     |      |        |        |         |       |
| CHARGED AGAINST THE PROPERTY HEREIN DESCRIBED  |  |              |     |     |      |        |        |         |       |
| OWNER AND ADDRESS  |  | DESCRIPTION  | LOT | BLK | VAL  | ASSESS | RENTAL | CHARGES | TOTAL |
| JOHN F. AHERN COMPANY<br>726 3/4 PORTLAND ST   |  | DARLINGS AID | 7   | 8   | 3960 | 12140  |        | 16100   | 5231  |
| PAID<br>FOND DU LAC, WIS.<br>JAN 9 - 1934<br>OTTO MUENTER,<br>CITY TREASURER.  |  |              |     |     |      |        |        |         |       |
| NOTICE<br>Examine bills carefully and see that the legal description is correct and that it covers all property on which you wish to pay and no other. |  |              |     |     |      |        |        |         |       |

A city of Fond du Lac receipt of payment for real estate taxes and special assessments.



Fond du Lac Vocational School, at the corner of Portland and Sheboygan Streets. Improvements to the facility and updates to equipment were made in the 1930s.

Fighting for their business in the thick of the Great Depression, the Ahern’s faced another loss that would end the second-generation leadership of the John F. Ahern Company. On March 24, 1936, J. F. passed away at the age of 65. A man who was deeply rooted in his community, profoundly driven, and who offered an acute sense of entrepreneurship was gone. But J. F. knew the value of a good succession plan! Having worked with his sons for years and having turned the business over to them long before his passing, they were ready to carry on without his presence. Thus ensuring that the Company would pass to a third-generation - already two more generations than most family businesses.

Tom and Don continued to grow their father’s business, perhaps with even more determination now that the family legacy was in their hands. The business steadily began to climb in 1936, 1937, and 1938 as the Great Depression began to lift. Don and Tom continued to execute their father’s pre-Great Depression business plan of commercial work in manufacturing, health care, and state facilities. That being said, they would also continue to remain true to their roots and serve retail customers throughout the Fond du Lac area, which served as a steady base business for them.

**“Ahern can supply and build any mechanical system you need or want. We have the resources, the intellect and mindset that we will not lose, we will get it done safely, correctly, and at a fair price. Our customers are our number one responsibility to serve.”** - Jeff Batterman,

Construction Superintendent



A marketing poster featuring a variety of projects the Company installed mechanical equipment in, circa 1930s.



Coal-fired boilers found in the Veterans Administration Facility in Jefferson Barracks, Missouri.



**“Ahern is a leader, I feel we have the best tools and equipment of any mechanical contractor. We often hear that feedback from tradesman that have come to us from other companies. Our jobs are made easier because Ahern invests a significant amount of money to provide us with the best tools with the latest technology.”** - Tyler Gumm, Tools & Equipment Shop Manager



Originally known as “Madison Army Airfield,” Truax Field was activated as an Army Air Forces airfield in June 1942 during World War II.



Employees working on a WWII army barracks housing project in Paducah, Kentucky. During the war years, Ahern would travel throughout the country performing projects to support the war effort on the home front.

From 1941 to 1945, Ahern bid and completed some of the most meaningful jobs in Company history, cementing its reputation as a dependable contractor able to take on and complete large jobs in a timely manner - all critical competencies necessary to build the infrastructure to support the massive war efforts overseas. Ahern built everything from airforce bases to military barracks to housing. Their efforts paid off, and John F. Ahern Company bounced back from the Great Depression with a vengeance.

By 1945, Company revenues had more than tripled under the steady hands of Tom and Don’s leadership, relying on the values taught to them by J. F. However, in 1945, Tom and Don made an important decision - they decided to take those revenues and plow them back into the business to purchase large trucks and new equipment resulting in a net loss that year. While this was a short term loss for John F. Ahern Company, it would pay huge dividends the remaining half of the decade with Ahern completing hospitals in Kansas, Iowa, Illinois, and a \$3.4 million addition to the hospital in Fond du Lac. Not to mention four schools and a safety building in the same five year period just in Fond du Lac alone.



Circa 1940s - An Ahern crane working with general contractor C. D. Smith on work in downtown Fond du Lac.



Employees installing a radiant heating system for the Meiklejohn building. At that time, radiant heat was a new technology being used to heat buildings, circa 1945.



Ahern performed multiple plumbing and heating installations at the Giddings & Lewis plant. The company, founded in 1859, is one of the few Fond du Lac companies older than J. F. Ahern Co.



In 1951, after 71 years in business and three generations, the John F. Ahern Company hit a massive milestone of \$1 million in sales for the first time in Company history. The exponential business growth needed a new home base to house the Company headquarters. True to their roots, Tom and Don Ahern elected to build the new headquarters for John F. Ahern Company just off Main Street, at 55 North Macy Street. The 10,000 square foot building was completed in 1952, a combination of offices, shop space, and a large showroom. In 1953, John F. Ahern Company was renamed and shortened to J. F. Ahern Co., as we know it today.

Projects in the 1950s spanned opportunities that spoke to our country's growing needs, including government buildings, manufacturing facilities, prisons, and schools. It included several new buildings at the Mendota State Hospital, a mental health hospital in Fond du Lac, additions to the General Motors plant in Janesville, and several school additions in Fond du Lac. Ahern also did a great deal of work in Madison, including work at the state capital building, replacing almost all of the 100-year-old plumbing and three new dorms at the University of Wisconsin.

**“Over the years, Ahern has continually sought out opportunities for improvement from a technology and process improvement perspective. Introducing new platforms shows Ahern’s commitment for improving the growth, profitability, and removing barriers for our teams to be successful.”**

- Brandon Poehlein, FSE Service Manager



Drafting room at the new corporate headquarters built in 1952.



An advertisement for a “modern” 1955 bathroom featuring fixtures that could be purchased in blue, green, red, or pink.



A 1951 advertisement still using the old three-digit phone number. In the late 1950s 7 digit numbers would appear.

**“Ahern was very good at training their people in safety, always had new ideas, and were well ahead of the competition, hands down! The teamwork between the field and office always felt like family. We always got the job done, and I worked with many great people.”** -Bill Pinto, 42 year employee - Retired in 2011



Macy Street location, circa 1955.



The Macy Street showroom.



**“The Company’s transparency and interaction on all levels from Management Committee to interns is one the things I appreciate here the most. The pride I get from being associated with such a leader in the industry, as well the Company’s community involvement is unmatched.” - Craig Seider, Fire Protection Design Manager**

Throughout their tenures with J. F. Ahern Co., Don and Tom were teaching and encouraging the fourth generation of Aherns for entry into the family business. Tom’s son, Michael, a graduate of Notre Dame University’s engineering program, joined the Company in 1957. Following soon after, Don’s son, John E. Ahern (John Jr.), would join the family business on April 1, 1959. John Jr. first came aboard to manage Peerless Milling Co., a part of the Ralston Purina Feed Mill franchise that the Company had invested in. Meanwhile, Don’s other son, David, had completed his degree and service in the Army. During this time, John forged his business and customer service skillset while learning from his father and uncle. Don continued to be well respected for his plumbing knowledge and even served as the President of the Wisconsin Master Plumber Association in 1950, leading the battle for the actual enforcement of sanitary plumbing laws passed in the 1930s.



An equipment rental ad which includes a picture of the “Wayne Crane” on the right.



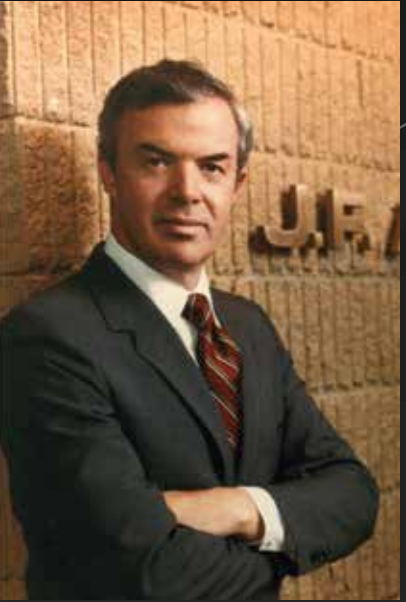
Ahern employees working in the trenches laying pipe.



An Ahern crane in action on an unknown jobsite, circa 1950s.



John E. Ahern, Jr., circa 1980.



David M. Ahern, circa 1980.



An Ahern crane lifting a man with materials onto what is likely the old Rupert Leather factory in Fond du Lac.

| STATEMENT  |   |
|--|---|
| LAW OFFICE<br>EDGARTON & HOBBS<br>104 NORTH MAIN STREET<br>FOND DU LAC, WISCONSIN 54601<br>TELEPHONE 921-8000        |   |
| Mr. J. E. Ahern, Jr.<br>J. F. Ahern Company<br>55 North Main Street<br>Fond du Lac, Wisconsin                        | FOND DU LAC, WISCONSIN 54601<br>August 31, 1966<br> |
| Attention: Peerless Milling Division   |   |
| Legal services rendered:   |   |
| 4/30/66 Conf. with J. E. Ahern, Jr.; survey right of way   |   |
| 7/12/66 Conf. re. sale of Mill and easement problems:  |   |
| Conf. with Robert Batts in St. Louis   |   |
| Conf. with J. E. Ahern, Jr.; draft buy and sell agreement  |   |
| 7/13/66 Telephone conf. with Robert Batts in St. Louis   |   |
| 7/19/66 Conf. with Batts re. buy and sell contract and misc. other matters, conf. with J. E. Jr.; conf. with Ralston |   |
| 7/29/66 Conf. with Marlin Goe, misc. conf. with J. E., Jr.;  |   |
| Draft Bill of Sale, deed and affidavit   |   |
| 8/1/66 Closing   | \$165.00  |
| Disbursements:   |   |
| Paid Fond du Lac County Abstract Company   | \$57.50   |
| Paid Postmaster for revenue stamps   | 66.00   |
| Paid for 2 telephone calls to St. Louis, Missouri  | 5.95  |
|  | <u>169.45</u>                                       |
| Total  | \$334.45  |

Invoice from Edgerton & Hobbs Law Office regarding the sale of Peerless Milling Co.

In 1966, Don and Tom decided to sell Peerless Milling. After several conversations with his father and uncle, it was decided that John would join J. F. Ahern Co. and start to learn the mechanical business by opening and reading the mail. While this seems like a relatively mundane task in today’s world - in 1967, it provided a full picture of what was going on in the business. Without faxes, emails, and the internet - every request for proposal that came in, every bid that went out, each piece of job correspondence that was sent and every check that came in the door showed the complete picture of how an HVAC or plumbing job was run.

In 1967, John, his brother David, and their cousin Michael approached their fathers with a succession plan. Tom and Don were well into their sixties at this point and had made a tremendous impact on the business - but time waits for no person. John, David, and Michael knew the business needed a solid plan to transition. In 1968, John, David, and Michael became minority shareholders in Ahern. In 1969, John was appointed President, and that same year, Michael left for the opportunity to purchase a business that did sheet metal manufacturing called Harbridge Inc., a local sheet metal company and canning equipment manufacturer. Subsequently, that same year Tom retired, and Don took a step back from the business.



John and David took full control of the Company after Don's death in 1971; Tom Ahern passed away four years after his retirement in 1973. Continuing to adapt to a changing industry, the fourth generation of owners took advantage of new opportunities. Environmental concerns spurred public spending on water and wastewater treatment facilities in the 1970s. Major environmental legislation was passed that would impact Ahern for decades to come, including the Clean Water Act in 1972 and the Safe Drinking Water Act in 1974. John and David started to position Ahern as an expert in water treatment creating slide projector presentations with cassette tape audio that explained how a modernized wastewater treatment plant worked and how it could benefit municipalities.

In 1973, Ahern purchased Milwaukee mechanical contractor Industrial Heating & Engineering Co. This acquisition, along with that of Star Plumbing & Heating Co. of Fond du Lac, allowed Ahern to expand its depth of services and geographic reach. Beyond acquisitions, the 1970s also saw J. F. Ahern Co.'s first venture into the pipe fabrication industry. Using a small section of the existing shop, the Company began performing prefabrication work for Ahern projects.

**"When I started, I was the only female in the office. I was the receptionist and accounting clerk. The workload changed dramatically with the onset of computerization. This would ease the ability to bid jobs, and as the Company grew, so did the Ahern commitment to do things right."** - Barb Blau, 24 year employee, Retired in 2008



Employees working on the irrigation system at South Hills Country Club.



An Ahern employee reviewing plans on a jobsite, circa 1970s.



Employees working at the Appleton Wastewater Treatment Plant Facility.



Ahern employees review project plans.

Towards the mid-1970's, Company growth forced John and David to convert the Macy Street showroom into additional office space, leading to the purchase of a separate storefront building to house the residential retail and service business. However, this decision was not enough to match the needs of the Company. By 1975, sales were approaching \$9 million. With a mounting number of large projects in the pipeline, Tom and Dave knew they outgrew their facilities, even with the recent move of the residential business.



Management Committee from left to right, Paul Bertuleit, David Ahern, John Ahern, Herb Herro, and George Bowers, circa 1970s.



**“During my first year of employment, we had to go to Plumbers Supply to pick up materials we needed, such as fittings. The new shop on Morris Street was a huge addition and benefit to us since it was on-site.” -**  
 Jim Smith, 40 year employee - Retired in 2002



Newly built headquarters building on Morris Street, Fond du Lac, WI, circa 1970s

Morris Street Lobby



In 1978, Ahern built a 30,000 square foot facility on 12 acres of vacant land on Morris Street, which still houses Ahern’s corporate headquarters today, just 2.5 miles from the original D. Ahern & Son’s Main Street storefront. The new building housed offices and tools but no real shops. The new facility met Ahern’s 200-plus employees’ needs and was a tangible representation of the Company’s success as Ahern moved into its second century of operation.

In 1980, the Company marked its 100th year in business and built The Mechanical Mobile 100. This educational display, built inside of a trailer and driven around the state of Wisconsin, showed the work of modern-day mechanical contractors. Although Ahern’s work is sometimes unseen or unnoticed by the general public, it positively impacts the lives of people in various ways every day.

**“We do an excellent job keeping up with the changes. We are continually researching the emerging trends and technology. When we find something that makes sense, we invest the time and money to develop it.” -**  
 Tom Wickersham, Director of Engineering



An inside look at the Mechanical Mobile 100, which featured HVAC equipment, a model of the West Bend Wastewater Treatment Plant, hospital plumbing, and fire protection systems.



**“My fondest memory is being a part of growing/starting the Fire Alarm construction product line. It started at zero dollars and now it is one of the fastest growing product lines in the company.”** - David Szymanski, FSE Regional Construction Manager

One of the most significant events in Company history came in 1980 when Ahern established a fire protection division. Seeing tremendous opportunity in the fire protection market and answering the call from customers asking for this product, John Ahern made the official announcement on November 3, 1980. Soon after, Ahern hired veteran industry member Jim Dhein to develop a department that would provide all types of fire sprinkler installations and related services, starting with only four employees, which quickly doubled by 1984. Later in the 1980s, it became evident the fire protection opportunities far exceeded the Fond du Lac area. Al Fox (retired shareholder and EVP) led the expansion efforts that resulted in the first Ahern Fire Protection (AFP) district office in Elk Grove Village, Illinois.



Ahern created a small fire protection shop in its Morris Street building. The shop shared space with the tools and equipment department, plumbing shop, and pipe fabrication to support the newly started Fire Protection Division, circa 1981.



An Ahern employee works on a fire protection system at First Interstate Bank, circa 1989.



The first fire protection district office located in Elk Grove Village, Illinois.



In 1982, Ahern was seeing fabrication opportunities outside of the Company and across the nation and decided to begin offering pipe fabrication services to external customers. By this time, the Company had employed some of the industry’s top welders. It had upgraded its equipment to compete in the external market, which included the “Cycl-O-Magic” welding machine. Ahern’s very own Chief Engineer, Stanley Kotecki, invented this state-of-the-art automated welding machine that met the dairy and brewing industries’ strict sanitary requirements. The Cycl-O-Magic would produce sanitary welds - which does not leave weld imperfections that could harbor bacteria or impede the flow of liquids - on thin wall stainless steel piping. This machine welded nearly two miles of stainless steel piping for the Pabst Brewing Co. Later in 1988, due to the rapid growth, the separate fabrication shop that stands today on Ahern’s Fond du Lac campus was built.

**“Ahern continues to embrace and encourage change when it comes to advancements in technology or processes to stay ahead of the changing climate. They invest in new technologies and empower employees to find the best, most efficient way of doing their job.”**

- Kimberly Wachholz, HR Business Manager



A newspaper clipping featuring the Cycl-O-Magic welding machine.



A welder in JFA’s Pipe Fabrication Shop working on a spool for the Waukesha Wastewater Treatment Plant, circa 1980.



During the same time, the Management Committee made the difficult decision to sell the residential plumbing business. After 103 years as a proud residential plumber serving the greater Fond du Lac area, Ahern sold the business to a former employee who opened a new shop on Main Street in Fond du Lac - just a block away from where David Ahern started it all a century ago.

Starting in the 1950s, Ahern had purchased a great deal of heavy equipment, including telescoping booms, air compressors, cranes, and power trenchers to service its jobs and occasionally rent out to others. In 1984, Ahern made the decision to sell its heavy equipment inventory at public auction. The Company had grown to the point where jobs were more diverse, and so were equipment needs. It became more economical to rent the necessary equipment on a job by job basis.

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**Large Construction Auction**  
**FRIDAY, MARCH 16, 1984**  
855 Morris Street, Fond du Lac, WI  
Sale Time: 10:00 a.m.



**J.F. AHERN CO.**  
MECHANICAL CONTRACTORS  
FOND DU LAC — MILWAUKEE

Excerpts from a flyer announcing the auction, 1984.

Recent changes in our corporate strategy have resulted in the decision to dispose of most of the major equipment and some of the smaller tools and equipment owned by the company.

Our work is spread over a much wider geographic area than has previously been the case. Also the percentage of our volume that demands major equipment is quite small in relation to our total volume. Thus, we have decided to divest ourselves of the major investment needed to maintain a quality fleet of equipment.

The equipment being offered for sale has been well maintained by skilled mechanics and can immediately be put to work in your fleet of equipment.



A promotional photo of the Company's truck fleet, circa 1985.



Ahern earns safety award in the 1980s for achieving more than 100,000 man-hours worked without a job-related injury or accident.



Ahern employees work on a wastewater treatment plant project in the 1980s.



Ahern support staff for purchasing and clerical duties, circa 1980s.

Throughout the 1980s, job complexity also drove an increased focus on safety as the most important part of any job. In 1986, John Ahern put the Company's first safety program in place as a public commitment of Ahern to the safety of its employees. Ensuring the safe return of Ahern's employees to their families each night became the most important thing that the Company would do and continues to focus on today.

Company history was made in 1989 when John and David made stock available to three key members of Ahern's management team. Jim Dhein and Al Fox - both Fire Protection Vice Presidents and Norb Schmidt, Vice President of what was then called the Mechanical Department, approached John and David about the idea of becoming shareholders. John and David spent some time talking about the request and recognized the important perspective and additional commitment that these non-family owners could bring. Since then, there have been an additional eight minority shareholders, including Mike Krueger (former CFO), Ken Collins (former EVP Ahern Fire Protection), Bob Fischer (former EVP Milwaukee), Jim Jarvis, Krista Ebbens, Adam Wunderlin, Tim Schneider, and Jace Hierlmeier.

**"I always enjoyed the people that I worked with at Ahern. I felt like a part of a team that was going places. The Company really valued and recognized its most valuable asset - its employees. Members of the Management Committee were just as accessible as any other employee."** - John Greve, 18 year employee - Retired in 2014



In 1988, John's eldest son, John E. "Tripp" Ahern III, joined Ahern as an assistant project manager. Tripp had spent the earlier part of the decade graduating from MSOE's engineering program and then working in New York for a large contractor for several years before returning to Fond du Lac. In 1991, David Ahern resigned from the Company to pursue other interests. That same year, Tripp was named a shareholder.

Fire Protection, only a decade old at this time, was enjoying fast growth during its teen years. In 1991, Ahern Fire Protection opened a district office in Milwaukee, and only a year later opened Omaha and Indianapolis district offices. During this time, Fire Protection in Wisconsin also extended its service capabilities to the La Crosse and southwestern Wisconsin area. In one year - 1994, the Fire Protection Division grew 38% from the previous year and then added St. Louis, marking the Company's fifth district office at the time.

In addition to growth around the Midwest, Ahern also kicked off the 1990s with a 10,000 square foot expansion to its Fond du Lac headquarters. The Company had already invested in a stand-alone pipe fabrication facility adjacent to the main building in 1988, which increased productivity by 30 percent. Around that same time, John E. Ahern, Jr.'s youngest son, Anthony J. "Tony" Ahern, joined the family business as an estimator for the Pipe Fabrication Division in 1992. Also, that same year, Bob Fischer, Vice President of the Water/Wastewater Division, would become a shareholder with the Company.

Then in 1995, the Company invested in a 42,000 square foot Fire Protection headquarters building in Fond du Lac. In addition to housing the district operations, the facility also provided fire protection fabrication services to all the outlying district offices and served as the material purchasing hub. In 1997 the Indianapolis office closed due to lack of growth. One year later, Ahern opened a Milwaukee-based Mechanical Service Department to perform routine maintenance and emergency repairs on all types of HVAC systems. The Company's diversity and growth were recognized on a national level in 1995 when Contractor magazine presented Ahern with its inaugural "Mechanical Contractor of the Year" award.



John E. "Tripp" Ahern III



Headquarters Expansion, 1990.



Anthony J. "Tony" Ahern



1995 - Ahern completed the construction of a new 42,000 square foot fire protection headquarters to house its growing Fire Protection Division. The building is located at Morris Court and is adjacent to the company headquarters.

As the 1990s continued, John Ahern had become heavily involved with the Mechanical Contractors Association of America (MCAA) and accepted the position of MCAA President in 1995. His duties at the Association, combined with Tripp's increasing industry knowledge and leadership skills, made it a good time for John to step back from daily Ahern operations. Tripp became President and Chief Operating Officer in 1994, and his father stepped into the Chairman/CEO role. 1995 had more leadership advancements with Tony Ahern, Executive Vice President of the Pipe Fabrication Division, and Mike Krueger, Executive Vice President of Finance and Corporate Services becoming shareholders. Tripp later added the CEO position in 1997, and John assumed the role of Chairman of the Board.



A group of Fire Protection shop employees take a break for a quick snapshot in the 1990s.





An interior view of the future sheet metal shop, circa 2004.



Ahern employees review project plans.



An employee doing estimating, using a software program called QuickPen on a digitizer board.

**“Ahern did a very good job with the acceptance and adaptation of new concepts with technology. We stayed ahead of the competition by our marketing efforts and being able to hire only the ‘right-fitted’ personnel.”**

-Doug Kitzman, 33 year employee - Retired in 2017

Two key acquisitions were made in 1998 in order to continue to broaden Ahern’s market base. In January, Ahern purchased Harbridge Inc., the sheet metal and canning equipment contractor that Tom Ahern’s son, Michael Ahern, had purchased in 1969. This acquisition allowed the Company to market the ability to design and manufacture heat exchangers for a variety of special industrial applications. Harbridge was conveniently located just two blocks from Ahern headquarters and included a quality sheet metal shop where Ahern’s current sheet metal shop still operates today. Harbridge and Ahern operated as separate companies, sharing the shop until 2002 when the canning portion of Harbridge’s business was sold to an employee. The second acquisition was XL Mechanical, a \$3 million contractor near Appleton, WI. The Appleton area is often referred to as the “Paper Valley,” as it lays claim to myriad pulp and paper mills. The XL acquisition enabled Ahern to expand its process piping services to the paper mill industry.

**“JFA was the best company I ever worked for. They appreciated the work you did for them, and it made you want to do the best job possible. I only wish I had worked many more years for them, earlier in my life.”**

-Gene Harris, 10 year employee - Retired in 1991

The Company’s Mechanical Contracting Division, which historically offered core services such as plumbing and HVAC installation, developed into its current structure in the late 1990s. Ahern broke the Plumbing and HVAC departments out on their own in order to grow them individually, and both departments began to develop the design/build capabilities that have since become integral parts of their everyday operations. The Water/Wastewater department continued to work on high profile jobs throughout the Midwest, as well as earn a reputation in the small project and maintenance markets. Ahern also established an Industrial/Process Department, dedicated to obtaining power and process piping work.

The 1990s ended as strongly as they had begun. In 1999, sales broke the \$100 million mark for the first time, reaching \$114 million. Industrial and municipal wastewater treatment plants comprised a substantial portion of the Company’s sales from as far east as Maine and as far west as California. Fueled by growth and work volume, that same year, the Company added a 34,000 square foot expansion to pipe fabrication building. The new facility featured 18,000 square foot of office space and 16,000 square foot added to the shop floor. It also included a corporate training center and employee fitness room. The added shop space enabled Ahern to separate its carbon and stainless steel welding processes and gave the division room to add more equipment as growth warranted. The Company would later win the prestigious Robert E. Kent award in 2001 from MCAA due to the shop’s innovation and serving as a model for fabrication shops across the country.



Pipe Fabrication building expansion, 1999.



Aerial view of the Des Moines Wastewater Treatment plant under construction.



Tony Ahern (left) accepting the Robert E. Kent Award from MCAA President Ron Pearson.



A pipe fabrication employee welds on a large pipe in the shop.



Ahern entered the new millennium in an enviable position. Well respected, financially secure, and operationally diverse, the Company strove to maintain the momentum. The aforementioned expansion into additional fire protection markets, combined with the acquisition of several large projects, kept Ahern in the forefront of the industry.

By 2000, sales topped \$110 million. That same year, after serving the Madison area out of the Fond du Lac office, the Company opened its Madison district office. This better positioned the Company to serve existing customers in the area and expand its customer base in northwest Illinois and eastern Iowa. Additionally, this allowed the Fond du Lac Fire Protection office to redirect their resources and improve operations in central and northern Wisconsin. The Madison office was equipped to provide both fire protection and mechanical service offerings. To better serve the Company's growing customer base in the Quad Cities, IA area, Ahern Fire Protection opened its Davenport branch office in April of 2001. This same year, the Company also opened the Des Moines, IA branch office.



Camp Randall Stadium received a major face-lift in 2002. The full project featured upgrades and renovations to the then 85-year-old stadium.



The Milwaukee Service Department, circa 2001.



A marketing brochure advertising fire protection services.

**“Ahern kept up with changes by sticking to contracting fundamentals. These fundamentals proved to be the basis of solid business planning, business execution, innovation and exceptional customer service. The annual process of business planning is the start of aligning a business plan with operations, business strategies and most importantly “people”. By my view, the process of annual business planning is what separates Ahern from its competitors and positions Ahern employees to increase the probability of success..”** - Rick Hext, 28 year employee - Retired in 2019

In 2002, Ahern Fire Protection added road operations in the St. Louis office. This new branch enabled Fire Protection to expand its coverage outside of the St. Louis metropolitan area. Fire Protection also established an Eau Claire branch in November of the following year. In that same year, Jim Dhein, the first fire protection employee at Ahern, EVP, and shareholder retired after 21 years of service.

2004 proved to be a prosperous year for Ahern, starting with a sheet metal shop 6,000 square foot expansion that added three additional pieces of fabrication equipment. That same year Ahern purchased the assets of North Central Piping, Co., Inc. (NCP), a fire protection contractor based in Neenah, Wisconsin. The Company self-performed all design, fabrication, and installation of its sprinkler systems, and also maintained a profitable service and inspection business. Due to the execution of several very large projects, the Company reached two milestones in 2004 with 1,100 employees and sales of \$160 million.



Sheet Metal fabrication shop expansion began in the fall of 2003.



Interior view of the sheet metal shop after addition was complete in 2004.





2005 marked the Company's 125th year in business, and it was a year of growth and prosperity. That same year, the Special Hazards department was created with only two employees. Today, this department is known as FSE (Fire Systems and Equipment) and now has over 100 field and office employees. Additionally, Fire Protection opened branch offices in Rockford, IL, Appleton, WI, and a district office in Minneapolis, MN. Also, in that same year, Ken Collins and Jim Jarvis became shareholders.

In 2006, the Company broke ground on a 54,000 square foot expansion to its Fond du Lac, WI headquarters. Focusing on environmentally-friendly building principles, the facility achieved LEED Gold Certification by the U.S. Green Building Council. Features included Wisconsin's first greenwater reclamation systems, an ice storage system, in-floor radiant heating, and high-efficiency fixtures. That same year, the Company established an in-house HVAC commissioning team, offering customers expert testing and balancing of their newly installed systems as well as retro-commissioning of existing equipment. A few years later, Ahern added building controls to its list of service offerings, giving customers a high-tech look at how their facilities are performing and pinpointing trouble spots and inefficiencies.

**"I liked the way Ahern was structured in running the company. The shareholders and management team did a great job in leading and providing direction for growing the business. A lot of effort was put into understanding the business and developing a plan through annual business planning for the direction and goals of the business and then holding people accountable to the plan."** – Faye Twohig, 35 year employee - Retired in 2017



Expansion underway on the corporate headquarters located on Morris Street.



An aerial view of Columbia St. Mary's Hospital under construction.



A sheet metal employee cuts HVAC duct in the headquarters expansion.



A helicopter-pick at the Sussex Quad Graphics plant in 2004.

Ahern was awarded the largest project in its history at Columbia St. Mary's Hospital in Milwaukee, WI in 2008. By the end of the project, several years later, Ahern had performed design/build HVAC and plumbing work throughout the 22-acre campus and employed upwards of 80 employees on site. Columbia St. Mary's was one of many healthcare customers for which Ahern would perform construction and service work. To date, Ahern has performed work in 60% of all hospitals in Wisconsin alone.

Tragedy struck in early 2009, when EVP of Finance and Corporate Services, Mike Krueger, passed away suddenly of a heart attack. His financial acumen had made a significant impact on the Company during his 18-year tenure, and his death left a void for employees as well as his friends and family. Ahern established a college scholarship in his name, available to employees' children with declared majors in business, accounting, human resources, or IT.

**"I joined Ahern in 2007, with the 2008-09 recession just around the corner. Instead of a company that froze in the face of a tumultuous financial climate, I saw an organization that strategically invested in its people, processes, and technology to come out stronger and well positioned to grow."** – Larissa Clinard, Logistics Manager



In 2009, the Company's commitment to safety was recognized when The National Utility Contractors Association (NUCA) awarded Ahern with their elite William H. Feather Award. NUCA chose Ahern out of 2,500 members, based on the Company's low injury record and comprehensive safety program. On a local level, Ahern earned safety awards from trade groups in every state in which we operate an office.

The decade closed out with just over \$199 million in sales and approximately 900 employees. A new fire equipment department was formed and brought added value to team selling. This group initially only serviced the Fond du Lac, Madison, and Milwaukee territories. Ahern's fire equipment customer base got a boost in 2011 when the Company acquired Airgas North Central's Fire Services Division. Ahern assumed service for all existing Airgas clients and also hired on Airgas' 29 employees, of which 14 still remain with Ahern. Today, Ahern's Fire Systems & Equipment team offers a complete line of extinguisher sales and service, as well as related equipment such as emergency lighting, fire safety training, and pre-engineered systems such as kitchen hoods, paint booths, and vehicle systems. The National Fire Protection business unit was formed in 2011. Today, the National group is one of the fastest-growing segments in Ahern's portfolio, performing work throughout the country in many of the 48 states in which it is licensed. National specializes in food and beverage manufacturing, cold storage, and other large complex fire protection projects.

In 2013, the Company logged 2.14 million man-hours - more than any year it is history. The record was short-lived, however, as employees logged 2.3 million the very next year. Despite these large numbers, Ahern's safety record was still consistently averaging 2.2 times better than the industry average. During this same year, the Company built a new 52,000 square foot office in Milwaukee. Additionally, with the rise of the internet and social media, Ahern adapted its customer communications to create a presence on newer marketing channels such as LinkedIn, Facebook, industry blogs, and an enhanced Company website.



A marketing brochure created to promote fire extinguishers.



A fire equipment technician works on a kitchen hood at Moraine Park Technical College in Fond du Lac.



A multi-trade rack for Froedtert & the Medical College of Wisconsin being lifted with a crane on to the 10th floor of the hospital's addition.

**“Ahern truly cares about their people. They put safety first and back this by allowing anyone from a pre-apprentice on up to stop work.”** – Michelle Garcia, Executive Administrative Assistant



Newly constructed Milwaukee office in 2013.



Interior view of the Milwaukee office mechanical room.



**“Ahern is a great place to work. We have many employees who have been here for over 40 years and is it something that we take pride in. Our focus is on developing employees and if you are interested, there are career opportunities and growth options in all of our locations.” - Arita Balken, AFP-Des Moines General Manager**



Exterior view of the Appleton office and shop space.

Although the Company always had a mission statement, in 2014, the Management Committee decided it was time to freshen it up. Our new Core Purpose was developed – To create and maintain systems that save lives, improve the environment, and ensure personal comfort and well-being. The unbreakable values and beliefs that the Company was founded on and continue through today were put down on paper – straightforward and honest, people and community at our core, committed to excellence, adaptable, and good stewards. The Company’s core purpose and unbreakable values and beliefs serve as a written commitment to Ahern’s culture and create a common understanding of what the Company and its employees expect of each other. Additionally in 2014, Al Fox, EVP of AFP, and shareholder, retired after 32 years of service with Ahern.

In 2015, Krista Ebbens (General Counsel and EVP HR) became a shareholder, as did Adam Wunderlin (CFO) in 2016. One year later, Jace Hierlmeier (EVP Ahern Fire Protection), and Tim Schneider (EVP Milwaukee) became shareholders. Also in 2017, the Company welcomed industrial ventilation capability to the Company’s product offerings. Industrial ventilation is different from traditional HVAC work that Ahern performs. Industrial ventilation deals with more extensive and heavier welded products, allows for plate and beam fabrication and installation, and has structural welded platforms and components. This new product capability included investment in state-of-the-art manufacturing equipment that is now housed in Ahern’s new 145,000 square foot facility in Appleton, WI, which was acquired in 2017. 2018 saw the opening of a new district office for fire protection in the Chicagoland area (Schaumburg).

**“Ahern does a great job and are always willing to invest resources and time into improving technology and keeping people safe on the job. This is a great by-product to having all members of the executive management team working in and on the business.” - Ben Putz, Senior Service Sales Representative**



**Core Purpose:**

**To create and maintain systems that save lives, improve the environment, and ensure personal comfort and well-being.**

**Unbreakable Values & Beliefs:**

**Straightforward and Honest.**  
True to our word every day. We do the right thing.

**Adaptable.**  
Learn from our experiences to discover the best solutions.

**People and Community at Our Core.**  
Lifelong, genuine dedication to each other and our communities.

**Good Stewards.**  
Committed to the future of our company, our people, and our customers.

**Committed to Excellence.**  
Driven to be the best in everything we do.





Members of the Industrial Services shop crew stand next to a large pipe in the new Appleton facility.



In 2018, additional operational leadership advancements were made. After almost 60 years of professional contributions to Ahern, John Ahern became Chairman Emeritus of the Board of Directors. Tripp continued to serve as CEO and assumed the responsibilities of Chairman of the Board of Directors. Tony Ahern assumed the role of President and Chief Operating Officer (COO). Tim Schneider became the Executive Vice President of Milwaukee, and Bob Fischer, Executive Vice President of Milwaukee, retired in 2019 after 40 years of service.

Tragedy would strike the Company in 2019, when it suffered a huge loss in February with the death of John E. Ahern, Jr. John's career with the Company spanned 60 years and created a lasting legacy. John valued not only the family-owned aspect of J. F. Ahern Co. but also the contributions that Ahern employees made to its success. John's impact on the Company and his genuine interest and kindness towards employees will not be forgotten.

**"While I wasn't quite yet working for Ahern, the one memory that will forever stand out was the day I interviewed. My wife and I were getting a tour of the campus and corporate building. We walked past John Ahern's office, and he quickly came out from behind his desk to introduce himself. At that moment though, John asked no questions about my career, the company, or anything like that. Rather, John asked about my family, my kids, and my interests. At the time, I had no idea John's position, but I soon realized. In that moment though, John made my wife and I feel so incredibly special."** - Josh Stepp, FSE Project Manager



An interior view of Site 1880, the Company museum, located on 17 S. Main Street in Fond du Lac.



Employee ensures industrial pipe is safely secured to the semi bed for travel.



Ahern Management Committee in 2020 from left to right: Adam Wunderlin, Tim Schneider, Tripp Ahern, Krista Ebbens, Tony Ahern, Jace Hierlmeier and Jim Jarvis.



Fire protection employee ensuring pipe is level while installing at Aurora 84 South in Milwaukee.

In 2020, Ahern began the decade with 1,350 employees, forecasted sales of \$344 million and work performed in 35 states. The Company also hit the momentous milestone of 140 years in business. To celebrate, the Company purchased a storefront in the same building where it all began – 17 South Main Street in Fond du Lac. The Company spent the year remodeling the space and filling it with pictures, mementos, and objects from the last 140 years. The space serves not only as a Company museum but also as a meeting and event space for employees. The Company was also recognized by PHCPro as America's oldest family-owned plumbing, heating, cooling, and piping company. Ahern was also named Midwest Specialty Contractor of the year by Engineering News Record.

After 140 years, J. F. Ahern Co. is stronger and more dynamic than ever. Why has this company survived, even thrived, while countless other contractors fail? How does J. F. Ahern Co. become a fifth-generation family-owned and operated business when most never make it past a second generation? What makes Ahern so unique? There is perhaps no single answer to these questions, but the hard work, determination, and adaptability of each and every employee of the Company has contributed to the success of Ahern and has uniquely positioned it for the next 140 years.



# J. F. AHERN CO. TIMELINE

1832: David Ahern born in Ireland

1850's: David arrives in Wisconsin

1860's: David settles in Fond du Lac with wife, Mary

1870's: David goes to work for stove manufacturer Azro Taylor

1880: David opens business with sons William & J. F. on Main St., called D. Ahern & Sons

1906: J. F. partners with John McCoy, names company Ahern-McCoy

1915: David dies of heart attack while grocery shopping at age 82

1921: J. F. Ahern incorporates, buys out McCoy, changes name to John F. Ahern Company

1920's: Business moves to Portland Street

1930's: Company expands into air conditioning as well as plumbing & heating

1936: J. F. dies; sons Tom and Don take over the company

1950: Sales exceed \$1 million for the first time

1952: Company moves to large headquarters/showroom on Macy St. in Fond du Lac

1953: Name officially changed to J. F. Ahern Co.

1968: David and John (Don's sons) and Michael (Tom's son) become shareholders

1969: Michael sells shares, purchases Harbridge Sheet Metal Co.

1969: John becomes JFA President

1970's: Control of the Company moves to John and David

1971: Don Ahern passes away

1971: Company begins performing pipe fabrication work for internal jobs

1973: JFA purchases Industrial Heating & Engineering Co. in Milwaukee and Star Heating & Plumbing in Fond du Lac

1974: Tom Ahern passes away

1978: Company moves to newly-constructed Morris St. location

1981: Ahern Fire Protection is formed

1982: Company begins offering fabrication services to external customers

1983: Company sells residential and service business

1984: Company sells inventory of heavy equipment

1988: Company builds separate pipe fabrication facility

1989: First fire protection District office opens in Chicago area

1989: Jim Dhein, Al Fox, and Norb Schmidt become first shareholders outside the Ahern family

1990: Company completes 10,000 square foot office expansion to Fond du Lac headquarters

1991: David Ahern resigns to pursue other interests

1991: Tripp Ahern becomes shareholder

1991: Ahern Fire Protection opens District office in Milwaukee

1992: Ahern Fire Protection opens District office in Omaha

1992: Bob Fischer becomes shareholder

1992: Ahern Fire Protection opens District office in Indianapolis

1994: Ahern Fire Protection opens District office in St. Louis

1994: Tripp becomes President and COO; John becomes Chairman/CEO

1995: Tony Ahern and Mike Krueger become shareholders

1995: Ahern Fire Protection builds \$2.5 million, 42,000 square foot Fond du Lac headquarters

1996: Company opens a Mechanical Service Department, based in Milwaukee

1997: Ahern Fire Protection closes Indianapolis office

1997: Tripp becomes President and CEO; John becomes Chairman of the Board

1998: Company purchases pulp & paper industry contractor XL Mechanical

1998: Company purchases Harbridge Inc., shares the firm's sheet metal shop

1999: Company adds 34,000 square foot expansion to Fabrication building

1999: Reported sales \$114 million (first year to surpass \$100 million)



# J. F. AHERN CO. TIMELINE

2000: Ahern Fire Protection opens District office in Madison

2001: Ahern Fire Protection opens Branch office in Des Moines, IA

2001: Ahern Fire Protection opens Branch office in Quad Cities (Davenport, IA)

2002: St. Louis begins road operations initiative to cover Columbia, MO area

2003: Ahern Fire Protection opens Branch office in Eau Claire

2004: Employment surpasses 1,000 people; sales reach record \$160 million

2004: Company purchases Wisconsin fire protection contractor North Central Piping

2004: Company builds 6,000 square foot addition to Sheet Metal Shop and adds state-of-the-art sheet metal fabricating equipment

2005: Ahern Fire Protection opens Branch office in Rockford, IL

2005: Ahern Fire Protection opens Branch office in Appleton, WI

2004: Special Hazards Department established

2005: Ahern Fire Protection opens District office in Twin Cities

2006: Commissioning services added

2006: Fond du Lac headquarters expansion breaks ground

2006: New Company logo unveiled

2008: Company begins largest project in history at Columbia St. Mary's Hospital

2009: Company mourns death of CFO Mike Krueger

2009: Ahern earns William H. Feather safety award from NUCA

2010: Hill/Ahern partnership established

2011: Ahern acquires Airgas North Central Fire Services Division

2011: Ahern Fire Protection opens District office in Des Moines

2011: Company establishes National fire protection business unit

2011: Ahern realigns corporate structure along geographic lines

2011: Ahern named one of the "Healthiest Companies in America"

2012: Company breaks ground on landmark Milwaukee office

2013: Company reaches man-hour record of 2.14 million

2013: Ahern achieves ASME Nuclear fabrication certification

2014: Hill/Ahern acquires Superior Mechanical Systems (SMS)

2014: Company begins offering Building Controls services

2014: Al Fox retires and Jace Hierlmeier becomes Executive Vice President of Ahern Fire Protection

2015: Krista Ebbens becomes shareholder

2016: Adam Wunderlin becomes shareholder

2017: Jace Hierlmeier and Tim Schneider become shareholders

2017: Company adds Industrial Services capabilities

2017: Company opens office and shop space in Appleton, WI

2017: Hill/Ahern partnership dissolved

2017: Company opens FSE office in Chicago

2018: John Ahern becomes Chairman Emeritus, Tripp Ahern continues serving as CEO and becomes Chairman of the Board, and Tony Ahern becomes President and COO

2018: Company backlog surpasses \$200 million

2018: 50th Annual Recognition Dinner held for employees

2019: Company mourns the loss of John E. Ahern, Jr.

2019: Bob Fischer retires and Tim Schneider becomes Executive Vice President of Milwaukee

2019: Company purchases original D. Ahern & Son storefront on Main St. in Fond du Lac creating museum and meeting space

2019: Company surpasses \$1 billion in work bid

2019: Company surpasses 3 million hours worked without a lost time injury

2020: Company celebrates its 140th year in business





...to the last 70 years.



17 S. MAIN

D. AHERN & SON  
STEAM AND  
HOT WATER HEATING

1880

AHERN

Mechanical & Fire Protection Contractors

Boilers • Pumps • Controls • Sprinklers  
Underground • Gas • Cold Water Distribution

2020

