

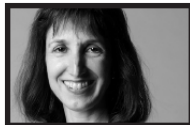


FAMILY FINDS A SILVER LINING

SCI-TECH SCENE | Next generation takes coating business to new heights



Ken Brand is president of Chicago Tank Lining, which has found many uses of its coatings — including recoating the water play feature of the Idea Factory children's area at the Museum of Science and Industry. | BRIAN JACKSON-SUN-TIMES



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An Evanston company started 50 years ago by a Russian Jewish family who serviced oil tanks inside people's homes is thriving as a specialty coatings business with the younger generation's leadership.

Chicago Tank Lining Sales Inc. traces its history to Raymond Brand, 79, who moved with two of his four brothers to Chicago from Brooklyn in a Quixotian quest to service oil tanks in a city that mostly used natural gas for heating. The family started as a franchise to apply a specialty epoxy to seal the leaks that would develop in the 275-gallon, 5-foot-tall tanks. One by one, the brothers dropped out, except for Raymond Brand.

"My dad [Raymond Brand] decided to stick it out [in Chicago]. . . . He was forced to find other uses for this material aimed at fixing these tiny oil tanks," said Warren Brand, president of Chicago Tank Lining Sales, one of two of Raymond Brand's sons who lead the company.

The company ended its franchise status and went out on its own in 1959. It differentiated itself by offering a 10-year guarantee on its work.

The 47-year-old Warren Brand and brother Ken, 56, the president, have found new uses for the epoxy too, resulting in a company with 10

full-time employees and yearly revenues of \$1.2 million to \$1.7 million.

Warren Brand, who joined the company in the late 1980s after a three-year career as a journalist, foresaw the beginning and the demise of a lucrative decade in which Chicago Tank Lining got into the business of coating the interiors of underground gasoline storage tanks.

The company's business has since expanded to include coating water tanks at the Drake and Ritz Carlton hotels, the Sears Tower and the John Hancock building, as well as sealing the shark exhibit and two sea lion tanks at the John G. Shedd Aquarium. The largest storage tank the company has coated belonged to Amtrak, stood 120 feet in diameter and contained 2.5 million gallons of diesel fuel. It corroded in the same way that the old-fashioned 275-gallon tanks did, because of water on the tank bottom corroding the walls and bottom.

Workers are now recoating the surface of the Idea Factory at the Museum of Science and Industry where children play in the water. They are putting Chicago Tank Lining's proprietary "Pool Armor" swimming pool coating on the surfaces without spraying it.

"It's like trying to apply cold honey in a cosmetically pleasing way," Brand said.

The overall epoxy industry is valued at \$5 billion in North America and \$15 billion worldwide.

Brand sees Chicago Tank Lining's next growth area lining swimming pools with the Pool Armor system, which leaves a smooth, tile-like finish. The company guarantees the work for five years.

Brand sees other opportunities because Chicago Tank Lining is the sole North American distributor of Fibaroll, a material with the consistency of damp burlap that turns rock hard when the sun hits it.

Fibaroll provides corrosion protection for tanks and pipes under insulation that keeps them warm or cold.

The 100-percent-solid epoxy coating must be heated to 110 to 115 degrees Fahrenheit, is applied to specially treated surfaces, and requires an airless spray gun to spray it through a space smaller than the eye of a needle. If a worker mishandles the spray gun, he can inject himself with the molten stuff.

Ron Atlas, president of Aquatech Stainless Steel Pools in Wheeling, said Chicago Tank Lining is the only company he has found that can successfully coat stainless-steel pools.

"We had been unable for years to find any material that would stick successfully to stainless steel," said Atlas, whose company has installed more than 2,000 swimming pools, primarily in commercial buildings, in its more than 40-year history.

Atlas has installed 20 swimming pools in the past three years in the Chicago area, and he notes that new high-rises at 505 N. State, Museum Park I and II and 10 E. Delaware are installing stainless-steel pools.

"The best reason to install a stainless-steel pool, to me, is because it might deflect slightly if there is movement in the building, but it won't break," he said. "Stainless weighs substantially less than concrete, and stainless fits better with many of the steel structures being built today."

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