

NUSHAGAK MECHANICAL CONTRACTORS, INC.

During an Alaska winter when temperatures can plummet to minus 40 degrees and below, Nushagak Mechanical Contractors is not only keeping the heat turned up, the business is helping its customers save money. Outside, the wind howls. Inside, renovated boiler rooms and an energy monitoring system keep the heating system running at peak efficiency.

Owned and operated by lifetime Alaskan Jerry Nicholson, Nushagak Mechanical is an Alaskan company that has built a reputation on providing plumbing and heating services to Bush communities. In business since 1983, Nushagak first began in the Dillingham area, taking its name from an Eskimo-Aleut village located in the Bristol Bay region.

"Operating in the Bush takes special considerations," says Nicholson, whose plumbing and heating experience first began with an apprenticeship in the Bristol Bay/Yukon-Kuskokwim region at the age of 16. "Having come from that background, I am very familiar with the rural Alaskan lifestyle. I know what kind of equipment it takes to operate at a remote site. I'm able to recognize the needs of people who live there."

"We can help our customers save up to 30 percent of their energy costs."

Working to fill those needs, Nushagak Mechanical uses today's technology to install efficient heating systems for both private businesses and government facilities operating in the Bush. With a wide background of past work, Nushagak lately is emphasizing its work with energy controls. As the state's distributor for an energy monitoring and control system produced by Control Systems International, Inc., a Texas company, Nushagak



Jerry Nicholson, Owner of Nushagak Mechanical Contractors

is currently working with MarkAir to install the management system in seven of the airline's terminal facilities at King Salmon, Deadhorse, Barrow, Kodiak and Fairbanks.

"With an energy monitoring system like this, we can help our customers save up to 30 percent of their energy costs. For instance, in King Salmon, we installed new boilers in 1989 and brought the energy monitoring system on-line this January. MarkAir has been happy with the results," Nicholson says. Networked through a stand-alone, on-site control box, the energy monitoring system uses a telephone/computer link to report the building status of the facility on a personal computer screen in Anchorage.

"In King Salmon, the energy monitoring system maintains the boiler set point based on the temperature outside of MarkAir's 18,000-square-foot terminal," Nicholson explains. "This program has a lot of potential. The system aids maintenance by identifying trouble spots before equipment breaks down."

Lights, unit heaters and the boilers can be automatically turned on or off, depending on the outside temperature or the time of day. "Anytime you turn off a light bulb when it's not needed, or lower the temperature on the boiler, you're saving money," Nicholson says. "I think this system is really valuable to businesses operating in this state."

Among the other specialties handled by Nushagak Mechanical Contractors are:

- Water source development
- Water transmission and distribution
- Waste treatment, collection and disposal
- Air handling and balancing
- Hydronic gas and oil fired heating systems
- Waste heat recovery systems
- Fire alarm systems
- Operator training
- System trouble-shooting

"Right now we're a small company, but I've got a good staff working with me who I know can do the job right," Nicholson says. "The work is out there and we're growing."

As company owner, Nicholson is comfortable both running the office at his Anchorage headquarters or strapping on the tool belt and joining his employees on the job site. With six other employees, including two of Nicholson's brothers and his nephew, Nushagak Mechanical is a close-knit company committed to doing a professional job. The firm's mechanical projects include a \$250,000 contract for the Alaska Native Hospital in Anchorage, a \$1.5 million contract for the Juneau Pioneer's Home and a \$600,000 contract for the Yupiit School District.

Nicholson says he will continue to bring in the best equipment and provide the best service he can to meet the plumbing and heating needs of Bush customers. But beyond the service contracts, the head of Nushagak Mechanical also hopes to eventually open a post-secondary vocational school focused on training rural Alaskans to maintain the plumbing and heating systems in their own communities.

"What I have to offer my clients most is quality work and my experience in the Bush," Nicholson says. "You can't get that with a lot of other companies. I know what's needed out there, what materials are best suited for the job."

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