



Brothers Tom (left) and Jim with dad Glenn Long in the early days of the company.

Long Mechanical has experienced tough times before now. The Detroit metropolitan area, where the plumbing and mechanical contractor works, became mired in the current economic downturn well ahead of the rest of the country.

"Michigan has been in a rut for seven years," Owner Jim Long says.

The company, however, has reason to celebrate this year. Long Mechanical commemorated its 60th anniversary June 5 with an open house at its Long Bath Design Gallery showroom for its customers and neighbors in downtown Northville, Mich.

The anniversary has given the management and employees of Long Mechanical the opportunity to reflect on what core values have allowed the contractor to operate profitably through thick and thin. Innovation, customer service and integrity top the list.

Long credits his parents and company founders with instilling these values in the organization. Glenn and Lois Long both grew up during the Great Depression and passed along lessons that have helped the company get through difficult economic times and make it to its 60th year.

Long Kitchen And Bath: Located in a well-appointed storefront at 190 E. Main St., Long Kitchen and Bath Design makes up the most visible segment of what is a diversified construction company. Although far from being the largest source of revenue, the showroom operation represents the innovation that has characterized Long Mechanical almost from the beginning.



(Left to right) Controller Dave Dixon, Allison Long, Jim Long, Doug Wojay and Ron Tini stand outside Long Bath Design Gallery.

Up On Main Street

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Photograph courtesy of Long Mechanical. All other photos: Bob Miodonski/Plumbing & Mechanical

Long Mechanical celebrates **60 years** of innovation and customer service.

That's because Glenn Long had opened his first showroom five years after he went into business with Lois in 1949. The showroom featured not only plumbing products, but also appliances to meet the needs of builders in the post-war building boom.

"Selling appliances showed that he was a progressive thinker," Jim Long says. "The business was a real team effort for Mom and Dad. Mom answered the phone and did the books while Dad priced out jobs and made service calls."

The showroom moved one more time before landing on Main Street. When the company outgrew the building that housed the original showroom, offices and warehouse, it relocated to a bigger facility in Northville in 1964. The rapid growth of the company forced another move to its current location in 1974.

Today, Long Kitchen and Bath Design employs three designers: Priya Niskodé, director of design; Lori Mounts; and Karol Gore, who

also is a licensed builder. Service Manager Doug Wojay oversees the showroom operation, which displays cabinets, lighting, countertops, bath accessories and tile along with plumbing products.

"We design and quote bath and kitchen remodeling jobs," Long says. "We'll do all the installation work but the wallpaper and paint. We'll do the dry wall and tile. Naturally, we'll install the plumbing and HVAC."

While the down economy has affected remodeling as well as new construction, the company still quotes, designs and installs some substantial bath-and-kitchen jobs, Gore says. A blog in the remodeling section of one of the company's Web sites (www.long-bathdesign.com) also promotes "Strategic Remodeling in a Strained Economy."

"Sample sales, clearance and promotions are great to investigate," Gore writes in her Aug. 24 blog. "There are many fabricators and vendors sending out stimulus promos to help the pub-



Jim Long oversees the operation of his diversified construction company from his office above the showroom.

lic right now. Clearance items can be hidden treasures, so don't forget to ask what may be available."

Long's showroom displays a variety of traditional and contemporary styles in fixtures and faucets. Customers' preference for more modern designs is increasing, Gore says. Brands on display in the showroom include Kohler, Elkay, Show House by Moen, Toto, Decolav, Blanco, Sterling, Hansgrohe, Moen, Newport Brass and Mansfield.

Emphasis On Service: Upstairs from the showroom are offices for company executives, including Jim Long, Doug Wojay, Vice President Ron Tini and Secretary-Treasurer Allison Long. Long's daughter joined the company full time two years ago after graduating from Western Michigan University with a business degree.

(Left to right) Jim Long, wife Virginia, daughter Allison and Ron Tini cut the 60th anniversary cake during the company's open house in June.



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Designers Karol Gore and Lori Mounts (left and right) consult with remodeling customer Beth Savoloz.

The entire operation today employs 54 people and has employed as many as 120 in the past. Annual revenues amount to \$13 million. When the Michigan economy was better, revenue ranged as high as \$21 million.

Long Mechanical consists of four divisions: Long Mechanical, which installs plumbing, piping and sheet metal in nonresidential buildings; Long Mechanical Service, which installs and services residential and nonresidential HVAC systems; Long Plumbing, a service-only operation; and Long Kitchen and Bath Design. Jim Long started a second contracting company, JR Long, in Tampa, Fla., in 1982 and sold most of it to three employees there in 2005.

The mechanical division generates about two-thirds of the company revenue. Customers include big-box retailers, schools, medical facilities, food-processing plants and municipalities.

Jim Long added HVAC service to the company 10 years ago. The plumbing and HVAC service divisions do no residential new construction. The service divisions and showroom operation split the remaining company revenue about evenly.

Service has been the key element of the company since Glenn and Lois Long founded it. In fact, a service call is what brought Glenn Long into the plumbing industry.

Far from having a background in plumbing, Long made rifles in the

Pontiac Motor plant during World War II. He became intrigued by plumbing when his landlord came to replace the plumbing in the home he was renting.

He and his wife started the plumbing business out of their house. Customers included homeowners as well as local business owners.

A natural mechanic with an entrepreneurial streak, Glenn Long learned about the plumbing business from his peers as well. He started the Western Wayne (County) Plumbing and Heating Contractors Association in 1953. He later served as state president of the Michigan Plumbing and Mechanical Contractors Association, as did Jim Long after him. The company belongs to the Plumbing-Heating-Cooling Contractors - National Association, Associated Builders and Contractors and the National Kitchen & Bath Association.

The lessons Long and his two siblings learned from their parents are the same core values Glenn and Lois practiced in their business.

"They instilled a lot of values in us: honesty, integrity and watching your money," Jim Long says. "We went to church every Sunday."

Tini attributes the company's success to the integrity of its people and the customer service they provide.

"We take care of our clients and customers," he says. "The people who use us, trust us."

Wojay adds: "Our service techs will not do the work unless the work needs to be done. We're very competitive on price but customers in our area call us because of our integrity and quality of our work."

The company makes "happy calls" to customers after service jobs to make sure they've had a positive experience, he says. Customers also can make comments about the service call online on the company's two Web sites (www.longplumbing.com and www.longmechanical.com).

"We've been lucky enough to hire a lot of good people," Long says. "I take great pride in what they produce in a day and their attitude on the jobsite. The service personnel we have now are the best we've ever had."

He calls his service techs the ambassadors of his business. They not only explain to customers the work that needs to be done on their plumbing and HVAC systems, but they also educate customers about the other types of work that the company can do.

"We've been around 60 years and some people still don't know we do remodeling and heating and cooling," Long says.

Besides the techs' efforts, the company markets itself through its Web sites, ads in newspapers and magazines, direct mail, truck signage and radio spots. It also relies on word-of-mouth from customers.

Long Mechanical has had to watch its expenses more closely during the downturn. That's a practice Long learned from his parents and one that he believes will make the business stronger.

"It's forced us to take a closer look at everything," he says. "When you run high on the hog, you can get sloppy in your business practices. You have to start tightening your belt a little and look for more opportunities."

Construction of two big-box stores, an elementary school and library are among recent opportunities for the mechanical division. On the residential side, customers are showing interest in green plumbing and the tax credits available with higher-efficiency HVAC equipment.

"We know what we're doing," Long says. "We continue to project a positive attitude out in the field." **PM**