

100 Years
Done



100 Years
Begun

**HAPPY
HOLIDAYS
TO ALL!**

TEAM

NEWSLETTER



December 2006

AB&I Team Member Profile

Dori Keenan, Customer Service Mgr, Recounts Changes at AB&I



If there is one voice that symbolizes AB&I to customers old and new across the country, that voice would belong to Dori Keenan.

As AB&I's customer service manager, Dori talks to most customers at one time or another, whether to process a routine order or solve an urgent problem.

But, Dori didn't start as AB&I's customer service manager when she joined the foundry in 1994.

"I started out doing customer service for the jobbing division," said Dori, referring to that arm of AB&I that produces custom iron castings for the automotive and other industries.

After a short stint in jobbing, Dori moved to the plumbing division, working as a customer service representative.

"My job back then wasn't really much different than it is today," she recalls, except that today she supervises the customer service departments in both

the Oakland foundry and the LA Service Center.

Over her thirteen years at AB&I, Dori has done a variety of jobs, from production scheduling to outside sales, again for the jobbing division. But her heart was always in customer service, and that's where she is today.

Although, technically, Dori is the customer service manager, she says she spends relatively little time managing.

"I have a great team, so I don't need to manage that much," she says. Supervising Jannine Longoria, Manuel Ascencio, Rene Sanchez and Maggie Moctezuma is pretty

simple, she says, because they all do their jobs so well.

Although not exactly an old timer at AB&I (some team members have been with the foundry forty years or more), Dori has seen changes during her tenure.

"We used to print our orders out on carbon paper forms," she remembers, "and that was a mess."

She's also been through several customer service software upgrades and subsequent trainings, but considers the fax machine and email more import tools in her business.

"We get more orders through fax than over the phone or EDI," she says, emphasizing that faxed orders are quicker and less prone to mistakes.

As for the future, Dori sees the foundry's future as bright. With assets like Dori and her customer service team, AB&I can't go wrong.

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As the World Gets Flatter, Will Our Education System Lead Our Kids Toward a Lower Standard of Living?

Yes, it will. Unless.

I'm not usually so certain of social trends and future developments, but on this topic, I am about as sure as I can be.

According to a recent study, almost 30% of American students fail to graduate from high school. Among minority kids, the numbers are even higher, with drop-out rates in some schools approaching 50%.

This is occurring at the same time that manufacturing jobs and low-skill employment opportunities are drying up faster than you can say "globalization."

These employment sectors used to soak up academic underachievers, enabling them to make a living and, in some cases, do quite well for themselves. But, as manufacturing and industrial employment dwindles, these opportunities dwindle, too, leaving little room in the economy for those who fail to complete even basic public education. What will happen to these kids as they become adults and cannot find career employment that provides them anything like the "good life" that so many Americans have taken for granted?

It's not like we haven't known about this trend for years. In fact, one of the most comprehensive studies on the subject took place way back in 1983. The federal government sponsored the National Commission on Excellence in Education back then to look at the emerging trends and forecast American competitiveness. In their landmark report, *A Nation at Risk*, the Commission predicted a steadily declining standard of living for Americans if we didn't get our act together in education. The report highlighted that American students just weren't keeping up with their counterparts in many (all?) other developed countries, and that the economic lead we enjoyed would evaporate if something wasn't done to reverse the emerging trends. Twenty-four years later, we're still struggling with what to do, and the rapid growth in less-developed countries like

China and India has taken place sooner and with greater gusto than even the "experts" could have predicted.

We see the results of the poor performance of our schools right here at the foundry, when job applicants can't fill out an employment application to even basic standards. It's distressing to think where these people will be in five or ten years. Will something miraculously save them from a life of poverty and frustration? Will they somehow find their way back to school, learn the basics, and re-enter the workforce charged and ready to compete against workers in Asia and the Far East? Somehow I doubt it.

To reverse the devastating social trends that are taking place today, every facet of society must adapt and re-commit to achieving universal excellence.

Schools must provide the resources necessary to foster continuous learning, and all students must be held to a much higher standard of achievement.

Teachers must be held accountable for their professional achievement, too, and rewarded for outstanding performance. Bad teachers, or those who refuse to get with the new program, must be replaced, quickly, so that another generation of kids is not lost.

School administrations must reassert control over their schools, even if that means necessary battles with teachers' unions and other groups. Academic success should be the only yardstick by which schools, teachers, and administrators are evaluated.

Parents must be held more accountable, as well, in making certain that their kids have the type of home environment and family expectations that can lead to improved school performance.

Employers need to do their part, too. Raising the performance bar a little each year, and insisting on continuous improvement, should be a part of every company's DNA, and imbuing employees with the importance of constant improvement is every manager's job. Meeting last year's numbers is

just not good enough.

I'll leave it to the pros to figure out how to do all this, but it must be done, and quickly. My own kids and grandkids are probably in pretty good shape, but just as a rising tide lifts all boats, an ebbing tide can ground them all, too, and that is just not acceptable in the land of the free and the home of the brave.

To make the kind of changes that have to be made, we need to look to the least advantaged among us and measure their advancement. If they start doing better, it's a pretty safe bet that the other kids are doing better, too.

One thing we know for sure: Americans at their best can compete with anybody, anywhere in the world. It's a tradition that we have enjoyed for over two hundred years, but it's up to us to continue it.

I've been asked by a couple of customers, what's changed at AB&I in the last few weeks since McWane bought a majority interest in the foundry. I have to tell them the truth: nothing has changed. We still produce the best cast iron DWV material in the world, still sell it through the same network of factory salespeople and manufacturer's reps, still have the best customer service department in the business, and are still committed to staying competitive by constantly investing in new manufacturing technology. Nothing has changed. From what we hear, McWane has no plans to change anything, either, and has, in fact, recommitted itself to domestic production. We'll keep you posted.

The entire team at AB&I wishes to extend a heartfelt "Merry Christmas and Happy Holidays" to all our friends, colleagues and customers. Although we continue to grow, we will never be too big to know, in our bones, the importance of the people in our business, and to take the time to say "thank you" for your friendship and loyalty. We appreciate you, one and all.



Featured Product

AB&I Silverspun™ Pipe: Still Setting the Industry Standard

In an age when competitors from all corners are attempting to sell their products by claiming to be "just as good as..." or "about the same as..." or "cheaper than..." AB&I cast iron DWV products, it's comforting to know that the pipe and fitting line that set the industry standard decades ago is still the industry leader, still performing as promised, and still a solid value.

AB&I pioneered the use of centrifugal pipe machines years ago, a manufacturing technique that not only sped the production of pipe, but produced an even, uniform wall thickness unattainable by older production methods. With this technique, molten iron is fed into a pipe-shaped rotating mold that literally "spins" it into shape. AB&I has dubbed its pipe, "Silverspun," in recognition of the way in which it is manufactured, and the painted silver ends that make it immediately recognizable as an AB&I product.

"Others have come and gone," says AB&I vice president for national sales, Gary Wickham, "but our pipe has stood the test of time."



AB&I cast iron pipe and fittings have been the preferred choice among plumbers since first introduced in the 1960s.

"We have people tell us all the time how much easier and more cleanly our pipe cuts," said Wickham, "and, unlike some of our competitors' product, plumbers don't have to worry about contaminated shavings when working with our products."

All AB&I DWV products meet all industry standards, and can be used in all projects calling for no-hub or SV cast iron in all parts of the country.

"We're also pleased that our manufacturing processes meet all environmental standards," continued Wickham. "Our air and water programs have made us essentially a zero-emitter," said Wickham, "making us a pretty good neighbor."

For more information about AB&I and our complete line of no-hub and service weight cast iron pipe, fittings, and accessories, visit us at our website, www.abifoundry.com, or call us toll free at 800-GOT-IRON.

Boom Market in Government Building

Public construction, in the form of government building projects, is currently in a boom cycle, rising 0.8 percent last month to an all-time high of \$273 billion for the year.

Federal spending is even stronger, rising 11.6% for the year.

This increase is in sharp contrast to the dramatic decline in residential construction seen over the past year.

Though overall construction spending has declined less than 1%, the residential sector of that market has decreased some 32%, as homebuilders put on the brakes in the face of slow sales and record cancellation of orders for new homes.

List Price Change...

AB&I has announced a price change on its line of cast iron DWV pipe, fittings, and accessories, effective January 1, 2007.

This price change will apply to the complete line of no-hub and service weight hub & spigot material.

The new prices will be published on our website at www.abifoundry.com by the end of December, and will be available in printed format at about the same time.

For more information, contact your AB&I field sales representative, or AB&I at 800-GOT-IRON.



Ten Ways to Remember the True Meaning of the Holidays

*In addition to the shopping and buying, take time to rekindle the real spirit of the season
(adapted from Reader's Digest)*



1. Keep a candle burning (but be careful!). The constant burning flame, holding back the darkness, is a potent symbol of life in the heart of winter.

2. Support a worthy cause. Make a donation in someone's name to an organization you know they would like to support.

3. Write a letter to your past. This is the perfect season for putting pen to paper to say "thanks" or reconcile with lost friends or family.

4. Give a gift that's really needed. Think about someone less fortunate who could really use something, then gift it to them.

5. Create a new family holiday. Spend time with your immediate family before traveling to see relatives and friends.



6. Build a holiday gift book. Buy a blank journal and a log of gifts that you received and gave. It's a great memory jogger.

7. Keep the holidays simple. Don't go crazy trying to do too much. Keep meals simple. Spend time with loved ones.

8. Set an extra place at dinner. Know somebody spending the holidays alone? Invite them to dinner. It can make their day.

9. Eat by treelight. If you have a Christmas tree, eat one meal by its decorative lighting. It can be a great experience, especially for the kids.

10. Go to a religious service. The holidays are a time to awaken our spiritual selves. Make this truly the start of a new year.

Just for Fun...

A Politically Correct Holiday Greeting

Best wishes for an environmentally conscious, socially responsible, low stress, non-addictive, gender neutral, winter solstice holiday, practiced within the most joyous traditions of the religious persuasion of your choice, but with respect for the religious persuasion of others who choose to practice their own religion, as well as those who choose not to practice a religion at all.

Additionally, we wish you a fiscally successful, personally fulfilling, and medically uncomplicated recognition of the generally accepted calendar year 2007, but not without due respect for the calendars of choice of other cultures whose contributions have helped make our society great, without regard to the race, creed, color, religious, or sexual preferences of the wishes.

(Disclaimer: This greeting is subject to clarification or withdrawal. It implies no promise by the wisher to actually implement any of the wishes for her/himself or others and no responsibility for any unintended emotional stress these greetings may bring to those not caught up in the holiday spirit.)



Christmas Song Quiz

The following are alternate titles for well-known Christmas carols. The first items reader to get 100% correct will be assured a full Christmas stocking and an official AB&I golf shirt. Fax your entry to 510/632-8035. Have fun!!

1. Quadruped with crimson proboscis
2. 5 p.m. to 6 a.m. without noise
3. Minuscule hamlet in the far east
4. Ancient benevolent despot
5. Adorn the vestibule
6. Exuberance directed to the planet
7. Listen, aerial spirits harmonizing
8. Monarchical trio
9. Yonder in the haystack
10. Assemble, everyone who believes
11. Hallowed post meridian
12. Fantasies of a colorless December 25th
13. Tin tintinnabulums
14. A dozen 24-hour yule periods
15. Befell during the transparent bewitching hour
16. Homo sapien of crystallized vapor
17. I merely desire a pair of incisors
18. I spied my maternal parent osculating a fat man in red
19. Perambulating through a December solstice fantasy
20. Aloft on the acme of the abode

