

Hanna Rubber celebrates 75 years

Longtime KC firm
relocates, prospers
after disastrous fire

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The Kansas City Star

Surviving a fire that nearly destroyed your business is one thing.

Picking up the pieces that same day and going on to celebrate 75 years in business nine years later is an added coup.

That's what Hanna Rubber Co. of Kansas City has done. Nearly a decade after a devastating fire caused about \$3.5 million in damage, the national distributor of rubber products has bounced back.

"It all boils down to relationships with people, from employees to customers to suppliers," said James B. Vandergrift, president of Hanna Rubber.

Hanna Rubber, which recently celebrated its 75th anniversary, employs 45 persons and deals with 300 distributors and more than 5,000 customers.

The company provides a variety of plastic and rubber products such as adhesives, belting, hoses, tubing, gaskets and footwear to customers such as Massman Construction Co., Hallmark Cards Inc., General Motors Corp., Ford Motor Co. and Trans World Airlines.

In 1999 the company had \$8 million in sales, and Vandergrift projects sales this year will reach \$10 million.

While the company's outlook now is bright, that wasn't the case on March 25, 1991.

That day, a three-alarm blaze at Hanna Rubber's former headquarters at 1512 Main St. left little but some company records that had

been kept in a fire-proof safe.

Even then, Vandergrift and his employees, determined the business would survive, sprang into action.

During a crisis that would have left many persons shell-shocked, Vandergrift that same day had phone lines installed in the basement of his home so he and his staff could take calls as well as call customers to assure them the company would stay in business.

A week later, the company moved to its new headquarters at 1511 Baltimore Ave.

The new location provided more space — 50,000 square feet, compared with 35,000 at the old location. It also allowed the company to add new product lines, which in turn helped increase its customer base.

And Hanna Rubber has established a Web site, www.hanna-kc.com, which also has brought in new business.

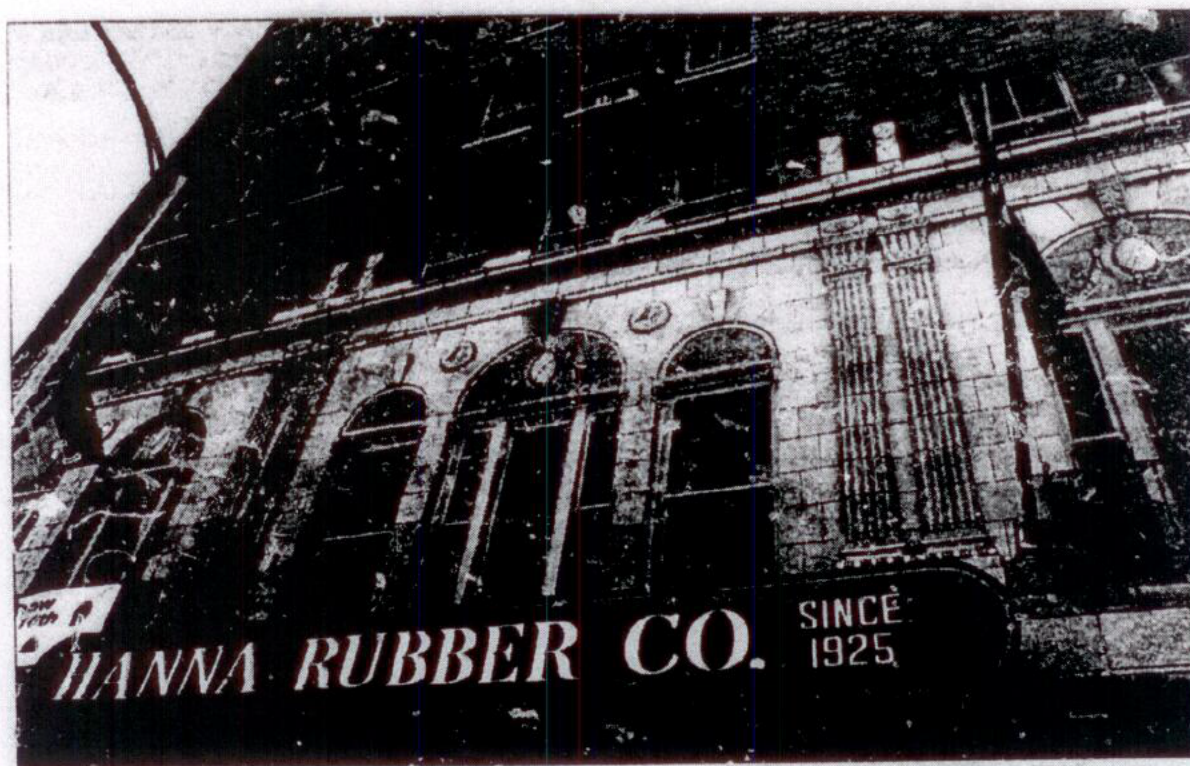
"I've gotten excellent service and support from them," said Steve Dolyk, purchasing manager for Massman Construction, a Hanna Rubber customer. "They are a good company, and from one longtime company to another, we wish them well in the future."

At a recent open house and picnic Hanna Rubber held to celebrate its 75th anniversary, about 400 customers attended. The picnic was held in the lot of the company's former headquarters, now affectionately known as "Hanna Rubble," Vandergrift said.

The event was partly to celebrate the company's survival, but also to thank employees, customers and suppliers, both old and new, for their loyalty.

"It's people relationships that are so important," Vandergrift said.

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After a three-alarm fire destroyed its headquarters in March 1991, the Hanna Rubber Co. moved into larger quarters at 1511 Baltimore Ave. The company recently celebrated its 75th anniversary.