

OKLAHOMA STANDARD, GLOBAL IMPACT

By Tara Malone

Zeeco, a leader in combustion technology, calls Broken Arrow home but touches the industry around the world.

Zeeco is a cutting edge company with a storied history.

This year is the company's 40th anniversary in its current iteration, although CEO Darton Zink says the principal business – combustion technology – has been in the family for 90 years.

The family's original business, the John Zink Company, was founded by Darton Zink's grandfather in 1929. Zink's father, Jack, served as president of that company for several years until the family sold the business and he left to start Zeeco in 1979. (Since then, the Zink family has had no association with the John Zink Company.) In the 1990s, Darton joined the ranks in the research and development area of Zeeco, making him the third generation of the family involved in the combustion technology business. In 2000, he became CEO.

Zink says being private and family-owned are part of what makes Zeeco the global powerhouse it is today because it "allows us to focus our thinking in a very long-term way. It also allows us to look at our colleagues and the people working in the company in a long-term way, and while we may not be a small business, the business still has a very family-oriented feeling."

Zeeco is one of the world's foremost companies in providing combustion products, with equipment operations in more than 100 countries, including China, the United Arab Emirates, Luxembourg and Brazil.

"We produce ultra-low emissions burners that provide heat to industrial processes, such as oil refining, power and steam generation," Zink says. "We also supply flare systems for the safe disposal of gases from emergency release in petrochemical plants and large-scale hazardous waste incineration systems, as well as lots of other products and technologies related to industrial combustion."

Zeeco's global expansion comes down to one priority: the customer.

"We follow where our customers go and where our customers are located," Zink says, "so every mark on our global map is a location that has the customer in mind, and to provide better services and support to help our customers in that part of the world."

No matter where Zeeco winds up, the heart of the company is in one place: Broken Arrow. The 250-acre Zeeco campus was purchased in the 1970s by Zink's father, who put a simple ad in the *Wall Street Journal* – "Wanted: Cheap land near Tulsa."

"The key to our growth is having land, and room to grow has been really helpful," Zink says. "It probably makes more sense for us to be in Houston, but our family is from Oklahoma and we love it here. We're proud Oklahomans. We're here because we choose to be here, and it's where our employees want to live and raise families."

Those employees are the other part of Zeeco's success equation, Zink says.

"I'd say if Zeeco has a secret sauce, it's our people and our culture," he says. "We are in a business that in many ways is very challenging and hard. We tend to attract people who are doers and who are smart, and we just have a remarkably supportive culture where people want to serve the customer, but also not let their colleagues down."

This atmosphere of team-oriented professionals is crucial when running a global enterprise, Zink says.

"About half of our business is outside the United States," he says. "There are many challenges with language, culture and time. Our customer base has high expectations, and the work itself is hard. But when the team has a great attitude and comes to work ready to go, well, that makes it fun and satisfying if you're the kind of person cut out for our business."

Zeeco also emphasizes hiring a mixture of experienced industry professionals and recent engineering graduates to tackle industry challenges.

"The cool thing about our business is that we have the opportunity and ability to solve the world's toughest combustion problems from Broken Arrow," Zink says. "We solve problems not only in the United States and in Oklahoma, but around the world." ■



DARTON ZINK TOOK
THE HELM OF BROKEN
ARROW-BASED ZEECO
IN 2000.
PHOTO BY JOSH NEW