

# From a doodle, to a \$6m fill plant

Keen Compressed Gas Co. expands specialty gas capabilities

By Molly Burgess

When Keen Compressed Gas Co. first started out as an auto parts store selling acetylene to the automotive industry, its founder, Stanley Keen, never imagined it would grow into the medical, specialty and industrial gases business it is today.

It was not until 1946 when the company incorporated the Keen Compressed Gas Co. name, as a result of the gas aspect of the business becoming more dominant. Since then, its involvement in the industrial gas business has continued to flourish.

In 1969, Keen purchased Anchor Welding which further tripled its size and, from then, its markets continued to expand and include higher end customers such as laboratories and research and development workers who required high purity gases for work.

Today, working with high purity gases, more commonly known as specialty gases, plays an even bigger

part in the company which has led to many new business ventures. In one of its most recent specialty gases business ventures, Keen Compressed Gas Co. constructed a new automated \$6m fill plant, which in fact first started off as a doodle on the back of a napkin.

Steve Shupe, Vice-President of Operations at Delaware-based Keen, told *gasworld*, “The new Keen fill plant is state-of-the-art and will serve Keen and our customers for decades. The planning stages can be traced back to a local corner barstool several years ago with ideas doodled on a napkin. As

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the need for expansion began to take shape, President Bryan Keen formed a group of associates and developed a planning committee.”

After lots of brain storming and lots of weekly meetings, the group soon established a defined vision which it believes will continue to serve for many years to come.

Shupe said, “We discussed size of structure, new bulk tanks, new pumps, utilization of existing pumps as back up to the new pumps, linear filling as well as pallet filling capabilities, cylinder unloading a leading processes, cylinder flow, bank or cradle filling, tube trailer filling, 6,000 psi cylinder filling options, and of course, a specialty gas lab with the latest analytical equipment.”

In 2018, the napkin-based dream of an automated fill plant became a reality when it became an approved blueprint, allowing Keen to break ground on the Wilmington, Delaware site in June 2018

that later become fully operational on September 30, 2019. Built to serve many industries alongside the specialty gases market, Keen’s new facility has been completed with the latest, well trusted analytical equipment used throughout the industry.

“We are equipped with trace level, percent level redundancy throughout the lab. GC capabilities, binary analysis, Gow-Mac process analyzers to detect nitrogen contaminations found in argon and helium, and the latest 2400 THC Analyzer,” Shupe said.

On top of all of its impressive features, equipment and capabilities, the new Keen automated fill lab is also an ISO 17025 accredited lab, something that was a proud moment for the team.

“We are extremely proud of this accomplishment and are fully prepared to serve the specialty gas markets with the highest level of quality. We look forward to new opportunities with regards to all facets of the industry this

plant will allow,” Shupe continued.

## Increasing capabilities

Keen’s new plant builds upon a long-standing history of unparalleled customer service and high quality industrial, medical and specialty gases.

It brings together the latest in gravimetric and automated fill room technologies which enhance efficiency, quality and safety. Specifically, fill room personnel utilize cylinder pigtailed equipped with quick connect CGA connections, palletized fill positions, and a custom designed cylinder bank/cradle filling manifold which increases the number of cylinders filled by 30%.

The improved manifold design and layout decreases physical movement and handling of cylinders by fill room personnel, thus decreasing repetitive cylinder handling motions which results in a safer working environment. Through precision cylinder filling and automation, pure gas, industrial mixtures and specialty mixtures filling is achieved with consistent repeatability for product conformance.

Keen’s new plant includes a dedicated inert specialty gas, argon, helium and nitrogen, manifold with micron vacuum capability to ensure the cylinder integrity achieves the highest purity requested.

Additionally, the new plant features five automated, gravimetric propane cylinder fill positions, to ensure all propane, including those with overfill

protection devices and those without are not filled greater than their legal capacity.

## Coronavirus, specialty gases

Amid the coronavirus pandemic, Keen is continuing to serve its customers with gases across the Mid-Atlantic region.

Justin Johnson, Vice-President of Sales and Marketing at Keen, told *gasworld*, “Industries such as manufacturing, technology, healthcare, and education remain critical to the growth of this market. As we all know, the welding and gases industry serves a critical role in the daily lives of all people. Our company was forced to deal with the coronavirus pandemic on a daily basis as it unfolded.”

The company has noticed a decline in demand from certain customers.

“While most manufacturing and healthcare businesses primarily remained essential during the coronavirus pandemic, the education segment has been adversely impacted,” Johnson said.

“Many of the educational institutions have been forced to send students home, which has led to a decrease in specialty gas products in the months of April and May. While we may not see this business return to its normal levels until fall or beyond, we are confident that conditions will return to a ‘new’ normal. This will allow research, development, and education to rebuild the need for specialty gas products.” [sw](#)



© Keen Compressed Gas Co. | Bryan, Jon and Kim Keen are the third generation running the company; cylinders lined up at the fill plant



© Keen Compressed Gas Co. | The cylinder fill station at Keen’s new fill plant

