

Fanimation is known for unique and innovative fan designs, such as The Caruso, which evokes the tropics.



Fanimation ‘MOVING ART’ THAT’S MOVING AIR

By Charlee Beasor

Putting the ‘fun’ in functional

Eaten in a restaurant or stayed in a hotel recently? Do you watch HGTV shows about home renovation? Have you ever seen the movies *I, Robot* or *Down and Out in Beverly Hills*? Maybe you’ve stopped under the breeze of a ceiling fan to cool down at a Disney theme park?

While this might sound like the most absurd questionnaire into your personal history, it’s actually a list of places where you might have experienced – but probably not noticed – a Fanimation ceiling fan.

Headquartered in Zionsville, Fanimation is known for high-quality, unique and innovative ceiling fan designs (such as the Enigma, a one-blade fan featured in the opening scenes of Will Smith’s *I, Robot*).

The man behind the fans, founder and CEO Tom Frampton, created the company in his Pasadena, California garage in 1984. He moved his family and the business to Zionsville in the early 1990s and the organization has continued to flourish with its new Midwestern roots.

As the company’s name suggests, the fans are designed to be functional as fans and move air in a room, but are also created to add style and serve as “moving art,” according to Nathan Frampton, son of the founder and current president.

“Over the years, we’ve been known for very unique products – different ways of moving air: moving art. But we have more to offer, and not just niche products. We have an everyday good, quality product that fits a lot of different designs,” he explains.

Hello, Hollywood

Fanimation’s Hollywood debut came in 1986 in the Bette Midler movie *Down and Out in Beverly Hills*, where the tropical-looking Palisade fan was featured. Frampton notes that though the company’s fans have been selected by set designers in several movies, it’s always a surprise because Fanimation doesn’t sell directly to customers.

“A lot of times we don’t know. And it happens a lot. Someone came and said to me, ‘Your fans are in a restaurant in Fort Wayne,’ and they almost acted like I should have known that,” Frampton says with a chuckle. “We’re selling a lot of fans, and we don’t sell them direct, so we don’t necessarily know.”

Of course, should Steven Spielberg call and want a specialty order of fans, he’s probably going to get those with no problem, he adds.

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Management: Nathan Frampton, president

How can you get a Fanimation fan? As specialty lighting stores and showrooms, as well as through many eCommerce partners, such as Wayfair.com and Build.com.

"A lot of people don't even know that decorative lighting showrooms even sell fans. But, if you think about it, a lot of homes have fans," Frampton notes. "When you're thinking about buying a light for your room, one out of four times it's probably a fan."

Family focus

Nathan, who stepped into the role of company president in 2007, handles all day-to-day operations for the company, which has around 60 employees (that number doesn't include contract manufacturers and an independent sales force). Tom is involved in fan design and engineering, and is the curator of the Antique Fan Collector Association Museum, which is on-site at the company headquarters. Two of Nathan's uncles also work at the company.

A family-run business in the fan industry is not uncommon, Nathan offers.

"There are a lot of family-owned companies in our industry and in some cases that family relationship can be a stress, but there's a number of examples in our industry where it works really well," he says. "What's really cool (about) my Dad and I (is that) our skill sets are by and large pretty different, but our opinion on strategy is almost always pretty dead on. It's very rare that we disagree on strategy."

Alex Ostrovsky, national account manager, has worked for the company for three years and asserts that the culture and dynamic set by the Frampton family is one where employees know what they have to do and enjoy their environment.

"In terms of day-to-day interactions, or anything related to the business, there's really no family versus the others kind of dynamic. ... It's a pretty lively culture in terms of we work hard and we also like to have a good time," Ostrovsky states.

And it doesn't hurt to sell interesting products either.

"It's actually kind of fun to sell cool-looking fans and things that change an entire décor for somebody's hotel. We do a lot of hospitality work, and that part is pretty neat, getting to see our products essentially transform a hotel. We also sell internationally, so we see a lot of before and after's," he adds.

Midwest calling

When Tom Frampton and his wife moved their family and Fanimation to Zionsville,

they were looking for a better quality of life, says Nathan.

"My parents thought — and it's true — that life would be better here. The quality of life was a better match for them," he affirms.

Frampton points to low crime rates, lower cost of living, better public schooling options and no traffic congestion as benefits of the Midwest location.

Fanimation products are manufactured via contract in Asia. The company has offices in Zionsville, North Carolina, Taiwan and China, as well as a showroom in Dallas and a regional warehouse in Ontario, California. The Zionsville headquarters primarily houses the company's call center, sales and management, engineering and marketing departments, as well as accounting and finance. A huge warehouse, as well as the

where it pulsates. Instead of one steady stream of airflow, it speeds up and slows down. There's a lot happening with fans," he explains.

Keeping on top of design trends and color schemes is also important.

"In the '90s, tropical was more of a thing. Things right now are more transitional, starting to get more towards contemporary, but more transitional products in richer colors, bronze, maybe gray," Frampton says. "We have to stay on top of that."

A seat at the table

Frampton is on the board of the American Lighting Association and has been representing the company in the face of impending federal fan regulations in Washington D.C.

"Some fans are more efficient than others, and the Department of Energy's goal

The Antique Fan Collector Association Museum attracts children who are "obsessed" with fans, says company president Nathan Frampton. Families – often from out of state – are frequent visitors.



antique fan museum, make up the rest of the Zionsville building.

On the cutting edge

Noting how important technology has become to the fan industry, Frampton explains that continuing to improve fan efficiency and offerings such as fanSync – which allows people to control their ceiling fan with Android or iOS phones – are his main priorities for the future of the company.

"The way you control a fan is going to keep improving. The functionality of a fan is going to improve. With a model we're coming out with in a couple of months, there's like 30 different speeds. It's almost like a dimmer. Not infinite, but so many speeds it's almost infinite. There's a setting

is to reduce national energy consumption, but do it in a way where it doesn't devastate jobs," he emphasizes. "Our industry – we're not a huge fan (no pun intended) of being regulated, but the process has already been initiated; it's because of existing laws. And we understand there's going to be regulations on some level."

He and others in the industry are offering input to the Department of Energy regarding the way fans are being tested and measured for efficiency. Frampton points to one possible silver lining: The regulations might be positively impacting the speed of innovation in the industry.

"While we don't all agree on how it (the regulations) should go down, having a seat at the table has been very important," he notes.

RESOURCES: Nathan Frampton and Alex Ostrovsky, Fanimation, at www.fanimation.com