



Kirby Risk’s roots are steeped in downtown Lafayette. J. Kirby Risk founded the company in 1926 with a \$500 loan from his father. Fifteen years later, operations moved to Third and Ferry streets.

FAMILY VALUES

Kirby Risk Celebrates 90 Years

By **Symone C. Skrzycki**

A brilliant showroom greets visitors arriving at Kirby Risk’s corporate headquarters in Lafayette. Lamps, chandeliers, wall sconces and home decor illuminate the company’s commitment to quality and service.

Jim Risk, president and CEO, extends a congenial handshake. Instantly, he shines the spotlight on his employees upon entering the adjacent electric supply store.

Risk stops counter team lead Brad Austin, a longtime employee, as he walks by.

“You’ve been with us now 12 months, isn’t it – something like that?” Risk inquires with a smile.

“Just short of 12 months and 30 years,” Austin quips, playing along.

“I’ve shared this with many people,” he reveals as Risk steps away. “This is not a job. This is truly an adventure because every day you have something new.”

“He’s a great dude. To find somebody at his, I’m going to say magnitude, to walk out here (into the store to interact with employees is rare). He knows my name. And I’ll tell you, he’ll know my wife’s name and my four boys’ names. Words can’t explain and describe that man. He’s very unique.”

Launched in 1926, Kirby Risk provides a wide range of services, including electrical supplies, sales and repair, as well as wiring harness/cable and quality component manufacturing. It has 45 locations throughout Indiana, Illinois, Ohio and Georgia.

There are five operating divisions:

- Kirby Risk Electrical Supply
- Kirby Risk Service Center

- Kirby Risk Precision Machining
- Kirby Risk Mechanical Solutions and Service
- ARCO Electric Products

A focus on values, family and “sacrificial service” – placing the highest value on customers, employees, vendors and community relations – have laid the foundation for its 90-year success story.

Leaving a legacy

Greg Brassie retired from Kirby Risk as an account manager in May, but couldn’t stay away. A few months later he returned as a truck delivery driver.

It’s a perfect fit.

“I love driving trucks,” he comments. “I’m cruising through my third week (as of mid-August) and have learned all kinds of great things.”

Linda Sorensen’s career at Kirby Risk spans 28 years. Sociable and customer driven, she’s a member of the inside sales team.

“I have fun with everybody I work with – sometimes a little too much fun!” she jokes. “I love dealing with the customers. I enjoy taking care of them and solving their problems. It’s a good feeling when I get them out of a jam.”

Doug Mansfield, president and CEO of Kirby Risk Manufacturing (which encompasses precision machining; mechanical solutions and service; and ARCO Electric Products), joined the company in 1971 when J. Kirby Risk, Jim's father, hired him.

"I've been here half of the 90 years. Can you believe that?" he declares, grinning.

Reflecting on decades of memories, he conveys "a couple things that really excite me."

"When you can exceed customers' expectations – delivering early, meeting their needs and doing more than anyone else can do for them – that's exciting. But the most important value is if you can see employees that 'get it.' And they accomplish something, and are excited and proud of themselves. That's the best."

Jason Bricker, CFO, grew up at Kirby Risk.

"My dad built this building (which opened in 1981)," he notes. "At the time, I was about 14 years old. I'd follow him around in the summer and help as much as I could on job sites."

The concept of sacrificial service has been a mainstay.

Bricker offers a scenario: "If you've got a customer that has a down situation in a factory, it's about jumping through a bunch of hoops to get them a part by 10 a.m. the next morning so they can get their line up and running again."

He began working at Kirby Risk in 1996. Newly married and living in Indianapolis at the time, he avoided a long commute by staying with Jim's parents (Kirby and Carolyn) three nights a week. He especially treasures time spent eating breakfast with Carolyn in the mornings.

"I'm going to take one moment and show you a picture of Carolyn on her 100th birthday," he remarks, reaching for his iPhone. "She had a party a few years back and I attended that."

"She was an absolutely sweet soul. Such a classy, wonderful, kind woman. And such a charming personality. You'll see a lot of it in Jim."

Striking a balance ... and a chord

Helen DeMarco's bold purple jacket and bright yellow bracelet mirror her vivacious personality.

She's connected with Kirby Risk's philanthropic pursuits during her more than 20 years there.

"It goes back to Jim and his dad and to how committed they are to the areas where we have locations," says the payroll and benefits manager. "It's pretty cool."

Down the hall sits human resources specialist Patti Graff.

"When I first started here, Patti and I were office mates," DeMarco reminisces.

"We shared a space."

With so many longtime employees, is it difficult for new people to fit in?

"We really promote the family culture here," Graff emphasizes. "Everybody feels that once they start working. In every department, that's just how it is. They pick up on that pretty quickly."

She's enjoyed exploring diverse interests.

"I've worked in several departments," she remarks. "I've been lucky enough to be able to move around and do different things. They're very open to that."

Cultivating talent is a big part of Doug Guttridge's job as vice president of human resources. And he loves it.

"From a functional standpoint, what I like about it is having the opportunity to help provide the next top performers to the organization through the selection process and through development."

Looking back and ahead

Stephanie LaOrange, vice president of finance and controller, is a relative

"newcomer" to Kirby Risk.

She's been with the organization 12 years.

"There's very much a family feeling," she stresses. "Not only the family of Kirby Risk, but also work-life balance is very important here. It gets a lot of respect (as does) rewarding hard work. There's a good balance between making sure things are profitable and understanding the soft side of the business."

John Eggleton, president and chief operating officer of Kirby Risk Electrical Supply, has been with the company since 2014. He's proud of the "Kirby Risk is Older Than" anniversary campaign, which consists of contests and events designed for customers and employees.

At the same time, he's intently eyeing the organization's future.

"I'm kind of the new guy that's trying to carry the history forward, but also make the changes that are required. Because in many ways, the culture, the people, the focus on our values – we want and need to take forward – that's who we are," he asserts.

"But as far as our capabilities, our technology



Outsourcing services for wiring harnesses, control panels, electrical/mechanical assemblies and parts kitting take place at Kirby Risk.



Kirby Risk Electrical Supply stores serve "anyone who walks in the door."



Adapting to changing technology has enabled Kirby Risk to flourish through the years. Motor repair employees are hard at work: (circa) 1955 and today.

and how we go to market, we've got to innovate and we've got to change."

Indeed, Kirby Risk has thrived by adapting to change – both technology-wise and within the industry.

In 1972, the year Jim Risk assumed the top role, Kirby Risk opened its first branch in Columbus, Indiana.

Another milestone (among many others) was establishing a major facility in Indianapolis in 1991.

"That was exciting because people viewed us as a small community distributor, and said our style of responsive customer service and

valuing others probably wouldn't work in a bigger community," Risk recalls. "We were successful from the very beginning there."

With a quiet, content tone of voice, he imparts:

"I firmly believe your happiest moments in life are when you're brightening the lives of other people – when you've touched someone in a helpful or positive way. I guess a perfect day is a day when you do something for someone and there's no way they can repay you. That's ingrained in our people: to give back to communities. You don't do it in a selfish way, but it helps create teamwork in our organization too."

RESOURCE: Kirby Risk at www.kirbyrisk.com


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