

# Mac, Inc.



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**Y**ou know those little space heaters you might use at your office or in the house? Imagine one 10 times as big or 10 times 10 times larger!

Paul Christianson builds really big space heaters: big enough to heat oil rigs and airplanes and anything under construction, from a house to a warehouse. The “small” ones put out 200-thousand BTUs and are about 8 feet by 4 feet by 5 feet in size. The large ones pump out 4.2 million BTUs and are 22 feet long, 8 feet wide and 9 feet tall.

His company is called Mac, Inc., and he and Jim McDonald founded it in 1985, when a similar business left the state. Paul says the first years were lean ones. “In the beginning, we had a lot of interest and they were interested in what we were doing, but they were reluctant to put any money into it because we were new, the new kid on the block. We had no track record and it was hard to convince people to take an interest in us.”

But thanks to Mary Beth Votava with the Small Business Development Center in Minot, they were able to put together different finance packages and get bank funding. Mac, Inc. started servicing

the oil industry, then after three years of research and development, the company got a contract with Northwest Airlines. The airline heaters keep the cockpit and cabin from freezing up in cold weather when the planes are on the ground.

These days, Mac Incorporated manufactures about 100 indirect fired heaters per year and sells about 75% of them to rental companies. Last year, the plant was expanded, but it’s already at capacity. Sales double each year, mainly by word of mouth and the internet. Paul says, “We’ve got heaters all over the world. But we’re fortunate enough, for instance, the oil fields—the oil companies will come to us, buy their heaters, and go overseas with them, and that’s been a big help to us and it also shows our heater around to the different parts of the world and other people see it.”

The company employs 20 people, mostly sheet metal workers, welders, painters and assembly staff, as well as Paul’s daughter Jean and her husband Dean Johnson, and Paul’s son Eric and his wife, Ronnie. Christianson says they’re always looking for and finding new markets, and he thinks there is still a lot of room for growth for his company, which is located near Glenburn.

Mary Beth with the Minot SBDC agrees. She says manufacturing is a huge target area that North Dakota needs to focus on for growth. But just as many North Dakotans have unique ideas, it’s that uniqueness that makes it hard to find start-up and expansion funding. Paul says the brains are here; but not always the backing of the bankers and other big players in economic development in the state. “The legislators need to put out more financing for the people that want to start a business in North Dakota. They need more people like Mary Beth and their organization to come out and work with these people. If you’re starting a new—have a new idea—you probably don’t know what to do with it as far as marketing. You may know how to build it, but you don’t know how to market it.”

Christianson knows how to market his product. What do you think heats his own shop? That’s right: a Mac heater!

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