

# TULSA BUSINESS JOURNAL

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## Business goes round and round



PHOTO BY KIMBERLY HILL

**Larry Houston, president of American Pipe Bending Co., stands inside a helical coil produced by his plant at 3207 Dawson Road. The coil, made of a nickel alloy that costs about \$1,000 a foot, is a \$1 million piece of equipment built for a DuPont paint plant in Mexico. See PIPE BENDER, page 6.**

# Pipe bender sees strength in diversity of product



KIMBERLY HILL

**Larry Houston, American Pipe Bending Co. president, stands before the firm's electric induction heat bending unit.**

**BY STEPHEN HILLMAN**

*stephenh@tulsabusinessjournal.com*

While some owners might have been anxious had they completed a plant expansion when the economic downturn hit, **Larry Houston** said his company needed the capacity.

His firm, **American Pipe Bending**, 3207 Dawson Road, has seen some slowdown from the economic slump, but, Houston said, "We are getting busier."

"We expect to have a good 2010," he said.

American Pipe Bending services a wide variety of industries, Houston said, and the expansion, which nearly doubled the firm's size to more than 100,000 SF under roof, was necessary — regardless of the economy.

"Up through '08, everything was going crazy business-wise; then, of course, everything slowed down very quickly," Houston said. "We were gearing up for that, but with our large diameter capacity, we needed the space anyhow."

American Pipe Bending is the only company with the capacity to bend pipe up to 42 inches OD in the state and region, Houston said.

"There are only about four in the U.S. and, worldwide, a dozen," he said.

The family-held firm, which fluctuates between 30 and 40 employees depending on backlog, operates at a minimum of \$10 million in revenues a year.

Founded in Tulsa in 1987, American Pipe Bending started out servicing local industry.

"People still say Tulsa is the heat exchanger capital of the world," Houston said. "We service that industry, with their small-diameter pipe ranges, all the way up to the large stuff. Tulsa has a great quantity of good customers for us."

He cited **Oneok, Williams, Magel-**

**lan, Willbros and Conoco Phillips** as examples.

The firm is now known nationally and worldwide.

"We virtually do bending for all pipeline companies nationwide, which is a real feather in our cap," Houston said. "That's years and years of experience, good reputation, quality service, etc., so that has been a real plus for us."

"And the fact that we are diversified. We are bending pipe to go over eight lanes of highways, for football goal posts, for breweries and wineries — other industries that carry us when one is down. That has been my theory all along is to be diversified in our sales base."

The decision that put American Pipe Bending on the map internationally was made in 1994, when the firm acquired its **Cojafex** electric heat induction pipe bending machine from South Africa. The machine, which was commissioned by Nobel laureate **F.W. de Klerk** in 1980 and still displays the plaque from its induction ceremony, is still state-of-the-art in pipe-bending technology, Houston said.

It gives American Pipe Bending the ability to bend pipe with wall thickness up to 4 inches for main steam piping in power and nuclear plants, as well as large-diameter pipe for pipelines and refineries.

Among the opportunities the large-diameter bending technology has opened for the firm, one of the most interesting was an order about five years ago from the **Said Arabia Pipeline**, Houston said.

"We had to make truckloads of 36-inch pipe bends for them," he said.

"We made all these bends just as quickly as possible and trucked them all to Houston. They dropped the whole nose of this plane, and we filled that plane with about 175 bends. To get that many bends in one airplane was something." ◀