

One of Lisac's Fireplaces & Stoves' recent installations included a DaVinci Xtreme 6020 fireplace in a private residence in Camas, Washington.



# GATHERING AT THE HEARTH

*Lisac's Fireplaces & Stoves* provides innovative products for heating and outdoor living needs

by Meredith Wargo

**S**ome people might think that selling fireplaces year-round would be as difficult as selling oceanfront property in Arizona. But for *Lisac's Fireplaces & Stoves* in Portland, Oregon, the 72-year-old family business has figured out not only how to do it, but how to be successful in a challenging market.

Scott Ongley, Vice President and general manager of Lisac's Fireplaces & Stoves, credits the company's approach in diversifying as the basis for its success.

"I married Rudy and Sue Lisac's daughter, Cecelia, in 1988," Ongley says. "At the time, business was steady, but the company's client base was 100 percent retail customers. It

wasn't until I left my career selling industrial fiberglass and joined the family business in 1993 that we started targeting other markets as a way to stay busy during the summer months. We started looking at remodel and new construction projects. From there we branched out to hotels, restaurants and assisted living facilities. It's been a slow, gradual build, but today our client base is 60 percent commercial and new construction and 40 percent retail and residential."

## GROWING THROUGH ADVERSITY

The Lisac family's journey in becoming a major provider of premium hearth products in the Portland area has been circuitous. In 1947, the Lisacs built a 5,000-square-foot, full-service supermarket, the first store of its kind in

ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF JUSTIN ONGLEY PHOTOGRAPHY





In 2016, Lisac's Fireplaces & Stoves installed a Pier linear gas fireplace from the DaVinci Collection in the Rivage, a luxury apartment complex in Portland, Oregon.



A custom home built by Vilhauer Construction for the 2018 Clark County Parade of Homes in Camas, Washington, featured a DaVinci Collection Bay linear gas fireplace installed by Lisac's Fireplaces & Stoves.

Southeast Portland. An influx of big-box grocery stores flooded the area in the early 1970s and negatively impacted the family-run market. As a means of survival, the Lisacs rented out one-half of their store to other businesses and downsized the variety of grocery products they sold.

"When the energy crisis hit in the late 1970s, people were actively looking for secondary heat sources for their homes," Ongley says. "That's when my in-laws decided to completely shift gears and started selling wood stoves."

The decision proved profitable in the long run. After selling wood stoves for more than a decade, Lisac's expanded the company's product base and became the first pellet stove distributor in Portland. The company continues to add products and services based on client needs.

"What has impacted our growth most recently is that three years ago we became the exclusive local representative for several high-end product lines, including the Maestro Collection and the DaVinci Collection, both made by DaVinci Custom Fireplaces, as well as Tempest Torch outdoor gas lamps and Lighting by Travis Industries," Ongley says.

"These products are highly sought-after by architects and designers because they are better looking and are of a higher quality."



Owners of Lisac's Fireplaces & Stoves (from left to right): Scott Ongley, Cecelia Ongley, Sue Lisac, Rudy Lisac and Paul Lisac.

Ongley explains that the price point for these particular products defines the clients that Lisac's Fireplaces & Stoves typically targets. "We don't market to tract housing or low-end apartments or condominiums. Our focus is on the \$1 million-plus homes and any commercial projects that fall into the medium- to high-end categories."



The storefront of Lisac's Fireplaces & Stoves' showroom, located on Airport Way in Portland, Oregon.

Lisac's Fireplaces & Stoves has evolved into a full-service hearth center that operates two showrooms in the Portland area, one in the original building that housed the family supermarket back in the 1940s.

## MEETING CUSTOMERS WHERE THEY ARE

Lisac's Fireplaces & Stoves has evolved into a full-service hearth center that operates two showrooms in the Portland area, one in the original building that housed the family supermarket back in the 1940s. The company offers sales and maintenance on a variety of classic and contemporary fireplaces, including wood, gas, pellet and electric. The company also provides the latest products that enhance outdoor living spaces, such as fire pits, heaters, barbecues and weather-resistant fireplaces.

"People often come into our showrooms with a preconceived idea of the product they think they want," Ongley says. "We run all of our potential customers—be it architects or homeowners—through an extensive questionnaire to zero in on what they're specifically looking for and the intended use of that product. More times than not, we end up redirecting them to something totally different that better meets their needs."

Lisac's Fireplaces & Stoves employs a staff of 13, half of whom are family members. "We currently have three service technicians who stay incredibly busy," Ongley says. "The rest of our employees wear multiple hats: from working on the salesfloor to being in the warehouse. Because we're a small family operation and because our business is somewhat cyclical, everybody on our team has

to know how to do everything. And although Rudy is 90 years old, he is still active in the company, as is Sue, who still does the bookkeeping for us."

## DREAM HOMES

The Street of Dreams is a trademarked event that showcases new homes in more than 20 major markets throughout the United States. The luxury housing show concept was first introduced in Portland in 1976 and was sponsored by the Home Builders Association of Metropolitan Portland.

For residents living in the Pacific Northwest, the annual NW Natural Street of Dreams has become a signature attraction that features several luxury homes designed with the latest trends in modern interior design, architecture and home technologies.

"Portland's Street of Dreams usually occurs in late summer and attracts up to 90,000 local homeowners," Ongley says. "It's become one of our biggest marketing ventures each year. If there is a builder with whom we're interested in working, and they are participating in the Street of Dreams, I'll use the opportunity to introduce them to our products and demonstrate why we are a better fit for high-end custom homes. We've been fortunate in that our hearth products have been selected in more than 50 percent of the featured homes in the Portland Street of Dreams since 1993." 🏡

*Meredith Wargo is a contributing writer with over 30 years of experience in writing about AEC people and projects.*