

Blair Fire Protection LLC – *Saving lives and keeping property safe*

Blair Burkette finally saw his dream come true. He launched his own business in June of 2008. There were many new challenges and obstacles along the way. The customers were being served very well, but Blair felt he needed to increase his knowledge of running a business and was not sure where to turn. He found his answer by attending the UWM Small Business Development Center (SBDC) Entrepreneur Training Program. He learned the components of business, including marketing, competitive analysis, and financials. He developed an organized business plan that would be his professional road map. When asked what the highlights of the class were, he said “market research, finding out about customers and competition, and learning all about cash flow and how to manage it. The class went beyond my expectations. I could have never learned all this on my own.”

Blair began his professional career as a journeyman automatic fire sprinkler fitter over 13 years ago. He enjoyed the work and had a passion for treating his customers well. He wanted more involvement with customers, the ability to respond faster to their needs and emergencies, and the personal freedom to serve them the way they wanted to be served. He knew he would probably not get that freedom working for someone else. This was his motivation to start his own business. It was 1997 when he started thinking about his dream. It took until 2008 to launch. He used his savings, home equity, and personal credit cards to fund the business.

Badger State Fire Protection filed as an LLC in June 2008. In January 2010, the company was renamed Blair Fire Protection, headquartered in Germantown, Wisconsin. It provides installation, service, inspection, testing, and maintenance of fire sprinklers and fire extinguishers. Blair says “our mission is to save lives and property from the destructive powers of a fire with our fire protection services.” The market is everything from two-family residential buildings, heavy industrial (such as chemical plants), and business centers. One unique feature of Blair Fire Protection is utilizing electronic inspection forms, making it convenient for customers to send reports to local fire departments, insurance carriers, or their own company. Another unique feature is that Blair Fire Protection uses sprinkler fitters for servicing all fire protection equipment, making it more convenient for a customer to have only one service professional on premise for multiple types of equipment. That is part of being customer service driven.

As the business started to grow, Blair discovered all his business experience was in the field. Learning to be a business owner was his greatest challenge. Soon after filing the Badger State Fire Protection LLC, he received an SBDC flier in the mail. It announced the Entrepreneur Training Program and Business Plan Development class. He enrolled in the December 2008 class. During the class, he refined and expanded his business plan utilizing the tools and assistance offered in the program.

Blair now has four employees and is considering adding a full time sales person. In his spare time, he teaches apprenticeship classes in sprinkler fitting, and other subjects including human relations, economics of the fire sprinkler industry, calculation, soldering, brazing, CPVP installation, and multiple code classes for MATC and Sprinkler Fitters Local 183 in Menomonee Falls, Wisconsin.



Business is good, business is growing, and he is treating his customers the way they want to be treated.