



ON a hot, 86-degree summer day, back on Aug. 23, 2008, a new fire protection company was born. The Menomonee Falls, Wis.-based business, now called Blair Fire Protection, provides active fire prevention and protection services to customers while educating them on how to make the best life and property safety decisions for the future of their buildings or homes.

Servicing a broad spectrum of customers in the southeastern corner of the state, Blair Fire Protection works with small businesses (e.g. House of Homemade Sausage), professional sports stadiums (e.g. Miller Park), big box stores (e.g. Menards), multi-family developments, facilities with flammable liquids, airports and healthcare providers. Clients have appreciated the “prompt and informed services” as well as the “timely, cost-effective implementation.”



Blair Burkette used the SBDC to “live my American dream” of starting a business.

The company’s namesake is its founder, Blair Burkette, who manages the day-to-day activities, including project estimating, customer service, business planning and development. Burkette, a life-long resident of Wisconsin, was just 18 years old when he was inspired by a couple of journeymen sprinkler fitters during his apprenticeship with Sprinkler Fitters Local 183. Those journeymen founded a company called FirePro and had operated it for approximately 10 years but were getting close to retirement. Like many entrepreneurs, Burkette was hit with a moment of clarity; for him, it was at age 29 while dating a “beautiful young lady” who eventually became his wife.

“I had come to realize that this was the best time—maybe the only time—in my life to give it a shot (at starting a business) and try to live my American dream,” Burkette said. “The owners of FirePro made the concept real that someone from our field could do it.”

Though Burkette was a skilled mechanic, he admits he needed to learn more about the business side of fire protection. After forming an LLC, he received a mailing from the SBDC and concluded it would be a “great resource.” Burkette began working with Laura Schmitz of the UW-Milwaukee SBDC from 2008 through the beginning of 2009.

Schmitz provided direction on how to operate a new business and some of the future challenges Burkette’s company could face. At the time, Burkette was working out of an office in a second bedroom, with spare material stored in an old shed with a dirt floor. In 2011 and 2012, the business plan he wrote with her guidance helped Blair Fire Protection secure an SBA loan with the Wisconsin Business Development Finance Corporation to purchase the current facility in Menomonee Falls.

BLAIR FIRE PROTECTION

Accomplishments with the SBDC of UW-Milwaukee:

- Developed business plan
- Created financial plan
- Secured SBA loan
- Expanded facility

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- Blair Burkette

Other aspects of working with the SBDC that Burkette enjoyed included the experience shared from speakers and instructors, the guidance on resources to build his business and financial plan and the interaction with other entrepreneurs. After initially needing a clear picture of future growth and cash flow of the business, Burkette said working with the SBDC was “a game changer coming from my background.”

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Burkette’s desire to exceed client expectations through high standards of excellence was a major influence for how Blair Fire Protection operates today. That successful philosophy, along with the SBDC’s assistance, led to the company moving to a larger location in 2012; Blair Fire Protection currently employs 22 professionals. And though his management responsibilities have increased, Burkette still loves being involved in all aspects.

“If I am lucky, I still get to pull on wrenches a few days out of the year,” Burkette said.