

Small Business of the month



Standing in front of TriNova's new \$4 million state-of-the-art training facility are, from left to right: Mark Cooligan, general manager - Memphis; Kim Watson, operations manager - Mobile; Robbie Watson, president; Chad Green, general manager - Birmingham; Tim Watson, vice president of outside sales - Mobile; and Tom Fox, general manager - Mobile.

'Retro' is Progressive for TriNova

Driving west on I-10, one can't help noticing TriNova's new building — and that's intentional, said **Robbie Watson**, the company's president and chief executive officer. Now open for a year off Halls Mill Road near the Tillman's Corner exit, the high-visibility spot is perfect for the company's marketability and proximity to clientele. TriNova is the Mobile Area Chamber's Small Business of the Month.

TriNova serves nearly every manufacturing company in the area, providing repair, installation and maintenance of process controls around the clock. Clients include manufacturers who produce everything from agricultural products to detergent additives.

"It's not an 8-to-5 job," said Watson. "We have to go where and when the customer needs us."

As manufacturers reconfigure staff and outsource work, this process solutions and equipment provider is seeing a demand for its services and has added six new employees since relocating from downtown Mobile.

TriNova's move serves another purpose, making room for its state-of-the-art training facility. The \$4 million capital investment allows 20 to 65 industry participants to take part in a week-long training session. The high-tech training area, a web of pipes and meters, gives students hands-on experience in service and an understanding of how TriNova-sold products work. Leaders of the company hope to expand the program to meet the needs of students pursuing education and job placement in the industry.

But there's more to the business than just training. TriNova recently won Endress +Hauser's 2010 Award of Excellence for outperforming all other authorized distributors of measurement instruments and calibration monitoring equipment.

Watson, who has an engineering background, took over the business, then known as the Frank A. Thomas Co., 11 years ago. In an effort to give the group a fresh start, employees participated in a contest to find a new name.

As founder, Robbie Watson chose the name "TriNova" because it symbolized the three facets of the company: sales, service and engineering. The 50-year-old company now employs more than 45 people locally and has other locations in Alabama, as well as Tennessee and Louisiana.

"We're kind of retro," said General Manager **Tom Fox** of the company's appeal. "It's what sets us apart. We're all about the face-to-face personal contact and the small business approach. We're getting away from the guy who takes calls from his house. We have a home base here in this facility."

According to Watson, that retro approach is propelling TriNova into the future and across the country. "Every time we've expanded, companies have sought us out. They want us to move in with our philosophy."

No matter where they expand, TriNova's leaders plan to stay close to their roots at home. "We've invested heavily here and this is where we want to keep it," said Watson.

Go to mobilechamber.com/award.asp to submit a Small Business of the Month nomination, or contact Danette Richards at 431-8652 or drichards@mobilechamber.com.