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Warfield & Sanford

100 years in business and still going strong in Washington, D.C.

by Kaija Wilkinson

When others say no, Warfield & Sanford Elevator Company says yes. Celebrating its 100th year in 2015, the Washington, D.C.-based firm specializes in going above and beyond what is typical to get a job done. Case in point: when former U.S. President George W. Bush's pair of White House elevators needed modernization, White House representatives encountered a series of "No's" before they called Warfield & Sanford. The job required that work be performed when the president was away, which meant employees had to work through the night when a chunk of time became available. Most companies found this caveat onerous. Not Warfield & Sanford. Company President John Warring, III, remarks: "We basically worked a 24-hour schedule." The job was finished in an astonishing 13 days, and Vice President Joe Lusk said people in the industry still talk about it.

From the beginning, the company has held fast to a tradition of frequent and clear communication with employees and customers. It still does some things the old-fashioned way, such as hand-written paper time tickets, which require customers' signatures. Warring admits he catches a little grief about that, but he believes it reflects the company's personal approach to customer service, which is complemented by the latest in technology and expertise in popular equipment, such as machine-room-less (MRL) elevators, which Warring believes are here to stay.

He is optimistic about the future as the company continues to diversify its client base. There are approximately 80 employees, including office staff. Warring anticipates he will soon add several field technicians.



Top to bottom:
(l-r) Don Sanford, president; John Warfield, vice president; E.G. Wright, corporate secretary; and an unidentified man during the company's early days

(l-r) Warfield & Sanford executives Mike Sweeney; Chris Fisher; Luke Warring; Charlie Griffith; Joe Lusk; and (seated) John Warring, III

(l-r) Maceo Mantooth, mechanic; Kevin Davis, adjuster; John Lusk, foreman; and John Warring, IV, mechanic. Just like his grandfather and father before him, John Warring, IV is working his way up through the ranks.



The massive number of government buildings in the U.S. capital has always been a big revenue driver for the company. John Warfield and Don Sanford, simply “guys who had a knack for fixing things,” founded the company in 1915 in a small building on E Street Northwest downtown. The pair employed fewer than 10 people, specializing in the repair of elevators in federal buildings and the sale and repair of motors for electric fans. In those days, fans were how lawmakers kept cool during the humid D.C. summers.

In the 1920s, the elevator portion of the business picked up considerably as fans gave way to air-conditioning systems. Warring’s father, John Warring, Jr., came on as an apprentice in 1957, ushering in an era of growth. Twenty years after joining the company, Warring, Jr. was named company president. He tripled the number of contracts before he passed away in 2002.

Warring, III followed in his father’s footsteps, joining the company in 1982 as a

Warring’s father, John Warring, Jr., came on as an apprentice in 1957, ushering in an era of growth.



Clockwise from top left:
Technician Steve Rye checks a circuit.

Company headquarters

(l-r) back row: Chris Fisher, project executive; Luke Warring, accountant; Doug Grandstaff, service manager; Monte Taylor, project manager; second row: Charlie Griffith, controller; Joe Lusk, vice president, modernization; Mike Sweeney, vice president; John Warring, III, president; Michele Schraf, sales coordinator; Bill Lacey, sales representative, maintenance; Jan Cunningham, office manager; Theresa Keysar, director of marketing & business development; Skip Miles, project manager; front row: Jon Diodato, project manager; Matt Warring, modernization sales representative; Seth Reeley, account manager; and Mike Lusk, sales manager.

mechanic. When he took over as president after his father passed away, he achieved even greater growth, with a focus on government and commercial buildings, hospitals, schools, condominiums, multifamily dwellings, hotels and large campus environments. He shifted the portfolio, from government to primarily commercial. Where the workload had

been 80% government and 20% commercial, it is now approximately 80% commercial and 20% government.

A current job of which Warring is proud is a five-year contract with the National Institutes of Health, which entails maintenance of 227 units. Another is the modernization of 27 units within a class-A office building on Pennsylvania Avenue.

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The best way to win new business, Warring has found, is word of mouth, particularly among commercial clients.

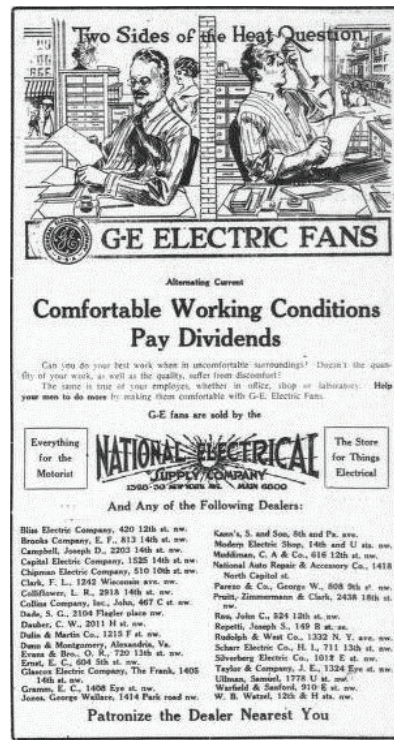
That job includes a full-time, onsite maintenance technician.

Warfield & Sanford Vice President Mike Sweeney points out another job of which the company is proud: the maintenance and modernization of 31 units in a privately owned Washington, D.C., building occupied by government tenants. In 2011, the company was part of a team that took over the job from a previous provider – a major OEM while the job was still under warranty. Also including a full-time, onsite technician, the job involved Warfield & Sanford implementing a Motion Control Engineering control system for an array of units, including MRL, gearless-passenger, freight and hydraulic elevators. “In January, we were just renewed for another five years,” Sweeney states.

Warfield & Sanford remains family owned and operated, with Warring’s sons, John Warring, IV and Luke Warring, in the business, both of whom have been with the company approximately 10 years. In addition, the company has a considerable number of young staffers in their 30s and 40s. When recruiting employees, Warring said he looks for a quality known as the “Warfield Way” – a concept passed on by his father. Warring elaborates:

“We can always teach people – our guys train each other as they go along. But we have certain ways we do things, and, first and foremost, we look for people who will be a good fit. When we bring somebody onboard, they have to be a team player, either in the field or in the office, and have integrity. So, when somebody comes in and has the potential to be part of our team, they will be hired, even if they lack experience, because they are definitely going to be trained.”

Warfield & Sanford covers the Washington, D.C., metro area as well as the Baltimore region, and is the oldest independently owned and operated



When the company began in 1915, electric fan motor repair was very much in demand.

company in the area. The company is an active member of many industry organizations, including the National Association of Elevator Contractors, Elevator Contractors of America, Building Trades Association, Apartment & Office Building Association and Property Management Association. Warring observes:

“In step with our focus on training, Joe Lusk, our vice president of Modernization, has served as chair and co-chair of the Joint Apprenticeship Committee for the International Union of Elevator Constructors Local No. 10, which handles all aspects of training and education for the National Elevator Industry Educational Program.”

The best way to win new business, Warring has found, is word of mouth, particularly among commercial clients. Further, the company’s attention to safety and communication has resulted in not only profit, but also an outstanding safety record. Warring opines:

“Personnel, passenger and equipment safety is our number-one concern. The company has maintained a nearly perfect safety record for almost a decade. We have received multiple safety awards from

our workman’s compensation provider. These prestigious awards were presented to a select 34 companies out of 28,000 policyholders and required that we had negligible losses in a three-year period.”

The company currently maintains close to 2,000 units. With growth has come a need for more space. In 2007, the elevator company moved from a 1930s-era, 7,000-sq.-ft. building that Warring says was “cramped and had multiple shelves on every wall” to a much newer, 27,000-sq.-ft. facility approximately 15 miles away.

“The company has maintained a nearly perfect safety record for almost a decade.”
– John Warring, III

Warring is 60 years old and plans to work until he is at least 70. He says he gets calls at least every several months from representatives of potential buyers, but the company has no intention of selling. He says Warfield & Sanford has approximately 15 competitors, including major OEMs and “some very good independents.” That makes bidding competitive and is good news for customers, he says.

Despite competition, Warring is confident Warfield & Sanford will remain among the top regional players. That is because of its mechanics, management team and office workers, Warring says. “I feel like we have the best.”