

Pollution fighters are cleaning up

By JENNIFER PARK

"I don't consider myself an environmentalist. I'm not a member of the Sierra Club or Greenpeace," says Rick MacKay, a partner and designer of air-pollution control systems at Caldwell-MacKay Co. Inc.

Environmentalist or not, MacKay knows he and partner Dan Caldwell are making a difference in people's lives and the environment. MacKay's ethic was shaped by something he once heard in a speech.

"I went to an environmental seminar once and the speaker said, 'Raise a child correctly. Plant a hardwood tree. And leave the world a better place.' I've done all that, and if that makes me an environmentalist, then I guess I am."

In the early 1980s — during a time of high inflation and low employment — Caldwell and MacKay left secure jobs to start their own company.

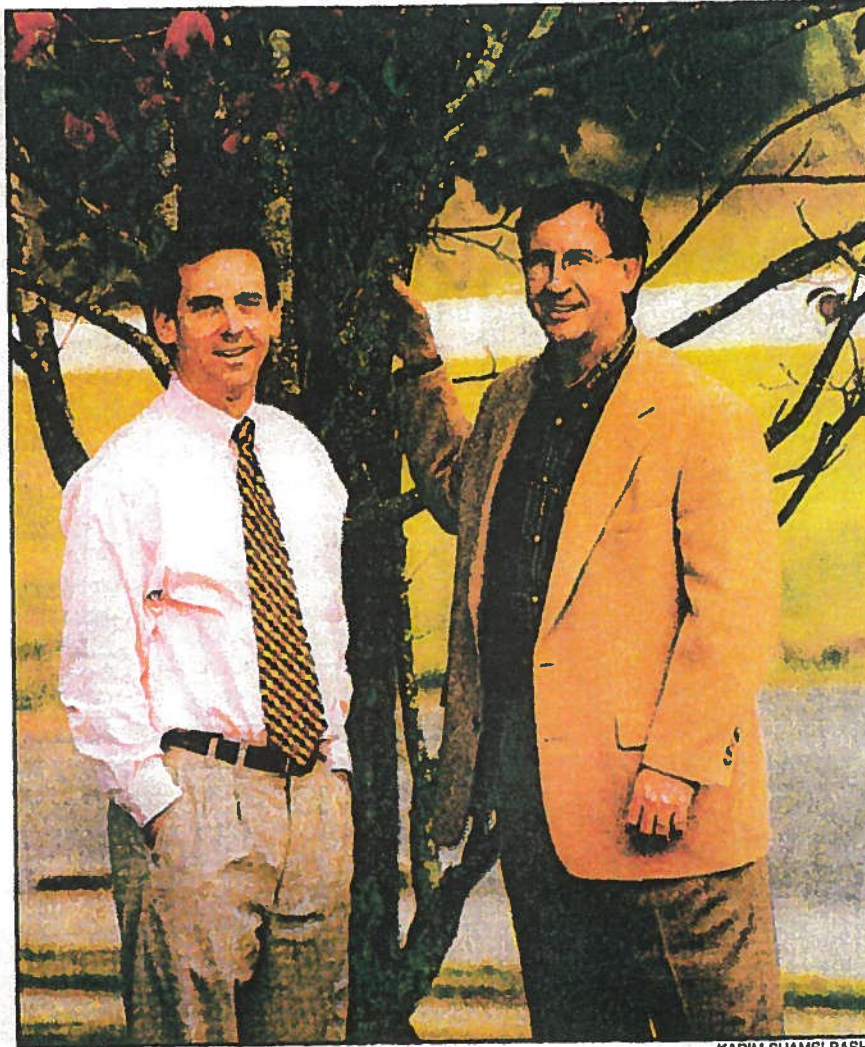
"Rick and I were both involved with the same company doing similar work, and we decided to go out on our own," Caldwell says. "We didn't have sense enough not to start a business during a recession."

Grabbing that first job

Their start-up continues to have two aspects. They act as a manufacturers' representative for other pollution control companies, supplying hardware that includes fans, duct work, pumps and collectors. On the other side, MacKay designs and constructs packed towers and fume scrubbers that are used to control air pollution.

Caldwell says the company's first design-and-construction job was for Kellogg/Brown & Root, an engineering and construction firm that builds pulp-and-paper mills. They submitted an unsolicited bid on a new paper mill in New Augusta, Miss., that needed a scrubber for the bleach plant.

"The lady that called from Brown & Root said ours was the only proposal that



KARIM SHAMSI-BASHA

Partners Rick McKay (left) and Dan Caldwell (right) don't consider themselves environmentalists, but the air pollutions control systems designed by their company Caldwell-McKay have been protecting the environment for almost 20 years.

had enough depth to it," Caldwell says. "She asked if we could start Thanksgiving Day. We said, 'Sure, and we'll bring the turkey.'"

Caldwell and MacKay knew they had

cleared the first hurdle.

"We knew we had to get that first job somehow, and that after we did we'd have the track record needed to get additional jobs," Caldwell says. "We knew our repu-

'We didn't have sense enough not to start a business during a recession.'

*— Dan Caldwell
Co-owner, Caldwell-MacKay Co.*

tation would be good enough."

Revenue in those early years was on the lean side, Caldwell says. The company made "\$500,000 or so" in the first few years. But with changing attitudes about the need to control pollution and ensure the health of industrial workers, the company's annual revenue is now "over \$5 million."

Earning a reputation

The public's awareness of the need for air pollution control is a recent development, MacKay says.

"Today, people are more educated and they demand to know what they breathe. That's part of the right-to-know policy that is posted in these plants and that most people working in them read," he says.

"Owners and managers pay much more attention now to the air that they and their employees breathe."

Responsible construction and operation of such industrial sites as pulp-and-paper mills has helped Caldwell-MacKay succeed.

"It didn't take an MIT graduate to see the equipment companies were using was lousy," MacKay says. "No one was trying to find out why the existing systems

Fighters

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weren't working. We did."

By using fiberglass and a PVC material in enlarged filtration systems, the company earned a reputation for being a top designer of air-pollution control systems.

A firm work ethic

"I tell people we're always the highest bid," MacKay says. "Then I tell them if the system is not done right, we don't want any part of it."

Clients include top engineering and construction companies that deal in the pulp- and-paper industry including BE&K, Raytheon, International Paper and Georgia-Pacific.

"We must be doing something right," MacKay says. "We have done several jobs for Dow, and they have an ad they still run (in trade magazines) that features one of our systems. And I was a young engineer when the picture for that was taken."

Caldwell also attributes the company's success to receiving good advice early on.

"Rick's father-in-law is Harry Brock, former chairman of Compass Bank, who is our financial advisor. He told us to be ready to weather a two-year storm until we got things going," he says. "One of the smartest things we did was get good advisers."

MacKay's father, Jack MacKay, who

CALDWELL-McKAY INC.

Business: Designs and constructs pollution control systems

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www.caldwellmckay.com

Year founded: 1981

Owners: Dan Caldwell and Rick MacKay

Number of employees: Four fulltime in Birmingham office; eight sales representatives

1998 revenues: "Over \$5 million"

Clients include: BE&K, Dow Chemical, Raytheon, International Paper

was then an executive vice president with ACIPCO, was their technical advisor and gave the duo "very good help," he says.

And, Caldwell says, "We were fortunate that my brother-in-law, Jim Black, was an attorney with Balch & Bingham LLP, and he was our legal adviser. We had good people behind us who gave us a good start."