

Legacy Profile

History Behind the Headlines

Twin-Industry Sales & Service Ltd.

“I think we did it right”

Twin-Industry has been serving western Canada since 1957. Its history is a Canadian immigrant success story, and reminds us of what is good about this country and this industry.

WORK ETHIC

Emil Solypa was born in the Ukraine in 1927 and his family immigrated to Canada in 1929. Raised on a farm and the eldest child, Emil had to leave school early and go to work to help the family. At age 19, after graduating from welding school, he went to work for Perth's Cleaners and Dye Works as a mechanic. After a year he was the head mechanic.

In 1949, the energetic Emil started a courier/messenger company with a one-ton panel truck. By early 1950 he had two trucks on the road. Business was very good, but Emil sold out in 1951 because it wasn't challenging enough for him.

“Once you have been in the laundry/dry cleaning industry, it gets in your blood. You miss it,” said Brent Solypa, Emil's son and the head of Twin-Industry today. “Emil had to get back into the business.”

He worked for different cleaners, but wasn't kept busy enough with maintenance, and so he learned cleaning and spotting, as well. When he moved to New Method Laundry, he found the large laundry had plenty of equipment – and breakdowns – to keep him busy. “Sometimes he'd go two days and two nights straight, never seeming to get a break,” said Brent.

THE BIG BREAK

Emil met the service manager from Prosperity Co. Inc. in 1955. It was the largest manufacturer of commercial laundry and dry cleaning equipment at the time. Prosperity was looking for a new distributor and very much wanted Emil for the job.

“Fred Sauberry from Prosperity convinced me to go out on my own,” said Emil. “He thought that I was a 'natural' for the industry and too good to work for someone else. It took Fred two years to convince me and I never looked back.”

On Dec 2, 1957, Emil and Alice Solypa started Twin-Industry Sales & Service Ltd., in Winnipeg, Man. The company name reflects Emil's view of the industry. “You

Right: Doing what he loved best, Emil helping kids as a Shriner.

have the laundry and the dry cleaning industry,” he said. “They are two separate industries, but they go hand in hand. It's a Twin-Industry.”

The original office was 144 square feet. (Today, the company works from a 10,000-sq.-ft. office/warehouse.) Prosperity sold equipment on a commission basis. Emil bought parts on his own as a dealer and was on a monthly retainer plus expenses for service work. Prosperity put Emil on his feet.

“WE DID IT RIGHT”

Emil's company was said to be the first of its kind in western Canada selling and servicing equipment and supplies to the dry cleaning, laundry, clothing manufacturers, hospitals, hotels and institutions. Emil also did complete machinery and piping installations and had the Prosperity line of equipment, serving as its representative for western Canada and as far east as Thunder Bay, Ont. Winnipeg had many garment industry companies. Emil's pipefitting skills were fast and neat and it didn't take long

to get work from most of the garment manufacturers. At the height of the garment industry, Twin-Industry had 10 pipefitters/mechanics working.

“The competition couldn't keep up, since Twin-Industry was a full-service company,” said Brent. “Emil was a genius with metal. He could engineer/design anything out of metal.”

“Whatever we did, I think we did it right,” said Emil. “We never took advantage of anyone and always tried to help our customers.”

For years Emil also travelled the road. He worked all day and half the night, and then drove the other half with his car loaded with parts and other gear to meet a client like a hospital administrator in

Photo on Contents page: Conrad, son of Emil Solypa, demonstrates a Coinette coin dry cleaning machine, “So simple that a child can operate it” in an ad in 1960s.

Right: Emil in 1957 and below, with son Brent today.



Saskatchewan first thing in the morning and sell a hospital laundry. Alice was holding down the fort, running the office, doing all the bookkeeping, making sure orders got out, coordinating service calls and servicemen, and always keeping Emil posted with phone calls. All the while, she also kept the home fires burning and raised their three children.

SUCCESS BREEDS SUCCESS

Financing was difficult to get for a lot of dry cleaners. One garment manufacturer was setting up a stone wash laundry and the only way he could get financing was if Emil would stand surety with the bank and take back all equipment within five years should something go wrong. Solypa knew he would succeed. Though he didn't look at it as a huge risk, it was. The factory grew to be one of the largest jeans manufacturers and

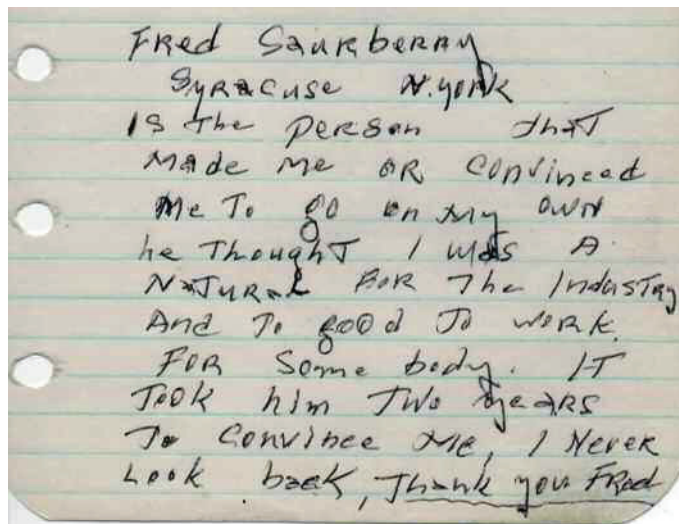
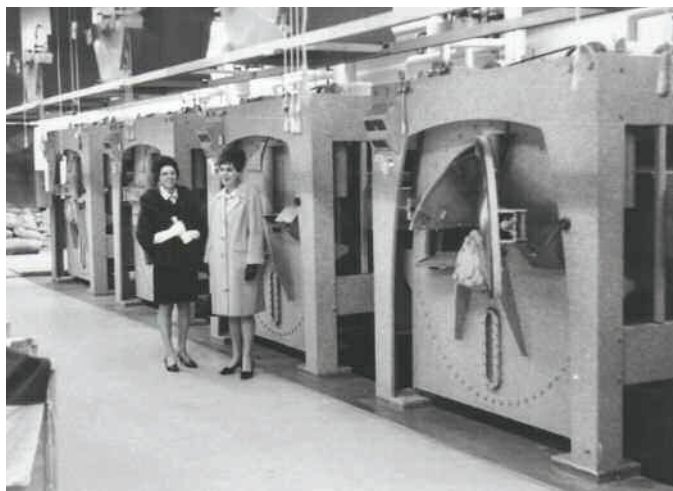
biggest laundry in the industry. Twin-Industry sold them every piece of equipment and serviced it. The laundry ran 24/7 for many years.

Emil financed many customers so they could get their businesses going. "I knew the people. They worked hard and were good people and I knew they would do well. They just needed a little help to get going," he said. Many of them became Emil's lifelong friends and treated him like family. While he was on the road, they insisted he come to their homes for dinner, and he even became the godfather for a baby of a good customer from Ontario.

Helping others was private for Emil. "He never told me about it," said Brent. "But I've had many customers who would say, 'Your father helped me out so I could get started.'



Right: Twin-Industry's original 144-sq.-ft. shop.
Below: The 10,000-sq.-ft. shop today.
Bottom: Alice Solypa (left) at a vintage installation.



A note from Emil's personal journal giving credit for his start in business where it is due.

Many times he struggled himself so his customer could get up and running.

KEEPING IT IN-HOUSE

Throughout the years Twin-Industry has sold a variety of brands of equipment. For 58 years Twin-Industry has been a complete laundry and dry cleaning manufactured distributor, selling everything from safety pins to million dollar hospital laundry equipment. The company prides itself on being self-sufficient. The staff members are trained mechanics, licensed gas fitters and high-pressure steam fitters, and quality control government-certified installers. They install and repair what they sell and do not rely on outside contractors.

SECRETS TO SUCCESS

Emil and Brent credit several reasons for Twin-Industry's longevity:

- They know the equipment. "Being a good mechanic is more than just being a parts changer."
- They know the industry, what their customers need, and how to help them be better.
- They help their customers by getting equipment running, being called out at all hours. "It's not always about the money; this separates us from the competition."
- They can do it all, from plant design, layout and set-up, through installation and hooking up all necessary pip-

ing and equipment, without relying on outside contractors. "No competitors are able to provide this level of expertise and service."

- They take pride in all aspects of their work. They overhaul and re-manufacture used equipment, sandblast and repaint it, and overhaul all parts and valves. "Equipment doesn't leave the shop with dirt and oil on it."

"Somewhere along the way, everything has gone from quality to price point," said Brent. "But quality workmanship is still a staple of Twin-Industry."

The company holds its long-standing business relationships with excellent equipment manufacturers in high regard, and continues to sell and service some of the best equipment lines on the market today. Twin-Industry has over 100 years of technical knowledge and, even after 58 years in business, sales this year are exceeding all projections. Hard work and dedication to the customer still pay off. Best wishes to Emil Solypa in his well-deserved retirement! ■

Companies that have weathered the changes in the industry and the economy have much to teach us. If your company has been around for at least 35 years and you would like it to be considered for a Legacy Profile, contact Becca Anderson, becca@fabricarecanada.com.