

# Hach is bulwark in Ames economy

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Hach Company has been a part of Ames for more than six decades, and, with some 300 employees, remains one of the city's largest employers.

Founded in 1947, it manufactures and distributes analytical instruments and chemical re-agents used to test the quality of water and other water-based solutions.

Plant manager Ed Volcko, who has been with the company since 1984 (a year after he received a master's degree in organic chemistry from Iowa State University), said in spite of a difficult world economy, water is about as basic a need as one can find in the world of work.

That's a point worth pondering in a challenging economy, said Rose Flaspohler, director of human resources. She said unpaid furloughs are in place in Ames and Hach's corporate headquarters in Loveland, Colo. But the workforce remains right around the 300 mark and hasn't changed in years.

One of the reasons for that is the steady demand for Hach's products, Volcko said.

"We make and distribute field test kits, laboratory instrumentations and systems that perform online testing," Volcko said.

In the digital world, Hach-made devices "can take a sip of the supply in a water plant and test it for chlorine content, for example," he said.

Instantaneous, online testing is a far cry from the portable water testing kit invented by ISU graduate Clifford Hach in 1947, and first offered in handmade oak boxes. Hach and his wife, Kitty, nurtured the company along and grew its reputation.

Today, Hach serves domestic markets as well as a growing number of foreign countries, especially Brazil, China and Japan, Volcko said. Its products and re-agents find their way into drinking water facilities in thousands of domestic and foreign locations.

The legacy of Clifford and Kitty Hach lives on in Ames, the United States and in other countries. That holds true even though Hach's corporate headquarters are now in Loveland, and, although it retains its name, it was purchased in 1999 by Danaher Corporation.

Production and shipping are the core operations at Ames, Volcko said.

"We have a payroll just under \$12 million annually," he said. About another \$1 million is invested in temporary workers.

"When you add our impact on the local market, such as property taxes, it easily amounts to another \$1 million," he said.

The company's reputation outside of Ames is important, too.

"After Hurricane Katrina, municipal water systems were down all over the South," Volcko said. "We got a call from the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta on the Friday after the storm. They needed field labs in place. We got there the next day."

In New Orleans or anywhere on earth where people need "safe water to drink, a safe way to process wastewater, or clean ways to re-use water, there's a need for what we make," he

said.

### **Sense of accomplishment**

Making sure that Hach products get to their destinations is the job of distribution manager Kevin Green, who works down the hall from Volcko's office in the administrative wing at the 170,000-square-foot building on Dayton Avenue.

In May, he observed his 26th anniversary with the company.

Green has been around Ames long enough to remember attending the old Central Junior High School in the late 1960s, and he was a freshman at Ames High School when it occupied a building that now serves as City Hall.

But he also recalls living in Ontario, Canada, where his father brought him from England.

"My mother's sister married an American World War II veteran, and he brought her to Iowa," Green said.

The sisters hadn't seen one another in more than 20 years when, in 1966, Green's father brought his family on a long train ride from Canada to Des Moines.

"My parents liked it here, liked being close to a relative. So we moved," he said.

While Green began his career in the grocery business, his father went to work at Hach Company in 1971. In the early 1980s, the elder Green persuaded his son to apply for part-time work at Hach, and he's been there ever since.

The job is demanding and satisfying, at the same time, Green said.

"Any given day, we're sending around 1,600 domestic shipments out of here," he said. "And there are 180 orders going out of the international shipping department. That may not sound like a lot, but the international orders tend to be much larger."

Married with two children — his wife, Kim, works at Hach, too — Green said his workday ends with a sense of accomplishment.

"You look at the empty conveyors and go home with a good feeling," he said.

### **'A great place to work'**

Even though he's been with the company only two years, engineer-technician Todd Schumer said he's found a good place to work.

"The stuff I get involved with is almost limitless," he said. "I might be helping engineers one day, working with mechanics on the next day, or maintaining equipment on the day after that."

A skilled machinist, Schumer assists Hach engineers in designing and making parts for the company's packaging machinery, some of which is unique to the business.

"We have one CNC (computer numerically controlled) machine on site to make parts for repairs or fixtures," Schumer said. "We do our own on-site computer-aided design. We make parts for the machines that package and fill containers here at the plant."

A local native (Ames High School class of 1990), Schumer earned an associate's degree at Des Moines Area Community College. He and his wife, who works at McFarland Clinic, are the parents of an 8-year-old daughter and 5-year-old son.

"We love the community, and the culture here makes it a great place to work," he said.