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MEMBER SPOTLIGHT



Chesapeake Cooling Solutions

Centerville, Maryland

NARSA/IDEA Member Since: 2021



AS A THIRD-GENERATION COOLING SYSTEMS BUSINESS OWNER, RYAN BURTON KNOWS RADIATORS.

"I was probably 8 or 9 years old when I was first introduced to a radiator and how to solder," said Burton. "Through high school, Burton made deliveries and did other small jobs under the guidance of his grandfather, uncle, and stepfather."

"My grandfather, stepfather, and uncle began the business in the 1970s as a service shop mostly working on buses and used cars. They had a radiator shop in the back of the shop." In the 1990s, the business solely focused on radiators and became Cecil Radiator under Phil Cecil, Burton's stepfather.



Burton then took a break from cooling systems and worked on a chicken farm, but that didn't quite pan out, so Burton came back to the family business. And that's when he was approached by Nick Slater to start their own business. Thus, Chesapeake Cooling Solutions was born in April 2021.

"We felt like we were a good match personally and professionally," said Nick Slater, Chesapeake Cooling Solutions Co-owner and Sales Manager. "Each of us had a ton of experience and attributes to bring to the table, which created a great initial recipe for our short term success. Ryan's ability to run, manage and scale the daily inside operations were a great compliment to my abilities to help outside sales, territory management, and business development. Ryan runs a great defense, to my great offense."

"At 42 years old, I kick myself for not just diving into the business right out of high school," said Burton. "But like any other kid, you think the world is better elsewhere. I should have just stayed where I was at. But I think it puts

more pressure on myself for wanting to strive to make my stepfather and my family proud."

Including Burton and Slater, Chesapeake Cooling Solutions has seven employees. The Centreville, Maryland based company's clientele includes the Eastern shore of Maryland and stretches to Baltimore, Annapolis, Washington DC, and to Delaware. Its services include thermal parts repair service, re-coring, ultrasonic cleaning of after-coolers for the marine industry, custom hydraulic hose assembly, custom antique radiator solutions, box units, and some metal fabrication.

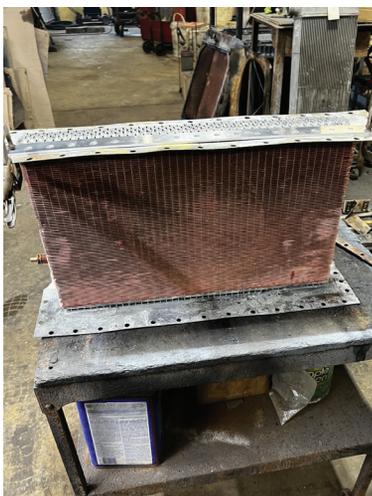
"Pretty much anything that keeps an engine cool, we'll agree to fix," said Slater. "A big part of our business is the marine and industrial markets. We've started to open up new departments with electrical and diesel parts. We're getting into turbos, batteries, starters, alternators. And we're trying to introduce more to a pre-existing customer base so we can grow organically and not exhaust our resources and spread ourselves too thin."

There are of course challenges with any company, but it's especially tough when a new business is growing too fast.

"Chesapeake Cooling Solutions has had some growing pains in its first 1.5 years in business," said Slater. "We keep laying down more and more groundwork every quarter to handle more revenue and more customers coming in. We have had to buy more vehicles, hardware, tools, and even added a major addition to our facility. Going into 2023, we feel we are positioned very well to acquire more market share and continue our



These after-coolers that were cleaned for a customer in the marine industry.



1912 Locomotive (only 2 in the world) that Chesapeake Cooling Solutions rebuilt.

growth projections very organically without wasting too many resources or too much time.”

“Another big challenge we had, like a lot of people during COVID, were supply chain issues,” said Burton. “Dealing with that plus price increases and keeping your price margins down to try and not upset your customers, that’s probably the most difficult part for me.”

Chesapeake Cooling Solutions joined NARSA/IDEA in 2021 in the early days of their business, but the owners would be lying if they said they weren’t apprehensive about joining at first.

“My experience with industry associations and up until this point were mostly a waste of time and money,” said Slater. “Getting any information to benefit your company (no matter the size of your company) was always a game of politics and deflection. So, when Ryan and I called up NARSA and asked to become a member, I was not expecting much... Boy, was I wrong! NARSA/IDEA has been a great resource for information, and networking.”

“It’s so nice to talk to people in the industry, because it’s not like they’re coming out of the woodwork,” said Burton. “There aren’t an over abundance of radiator shops. I could go down the road to talk to a mechanic, but he’s not going to know what I’m talking about. So, to get a chance to talk with somebody who does what you do, that’s really valuable.”

“When we took over the business, we were really in the dark ages when it came competing in 2021,” said Slater. “After starting our little shop in early 2021, Ryan and I had a thousand questions about how to not only start a thermal business, but also make a lot of the right decisions early on so we wouldn’t waste a ton of resources re-inventing the wheel,” said Slater. “There were never ending questions, because I like to pull the sweater thread down until there’s no more sweater left! Some of the questions we asked were, ‘What’s going on with DPFs? What’s up with Plastic Tank Aluminium? Who are the vendors out there we want to deal with in specific markets? Here’s what we’re doing now; are we doing anything stupid?’ No one’s giving me a bad answer yet.”



Both Burton and Slater say visiting Don Hart's Radiator in Texas during the NARSA/IDEA 2022 Spring Conference was eye-opening.

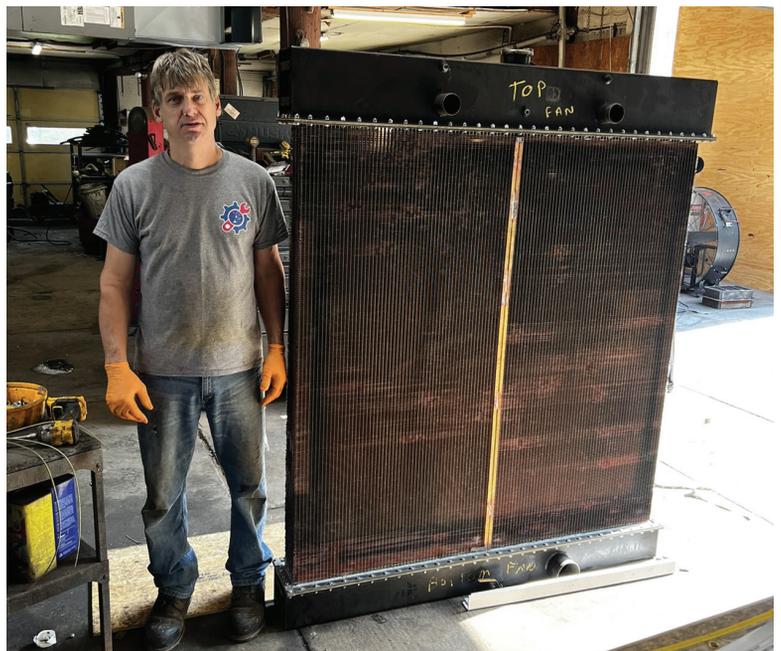
"The way Don Hart's Radiator's facility was set up was impressive," said Burton. "When you look at these big companies, you think, 'Man, I could never do that!' But then you go down there and meet them and see their operations and talk with them, you see they're no different than me, and it really gives me confidence. Eventually, I could do the same thing they're doing."

Slater also attended AAPEX 2022 in Las Vegas and the NARSA/IDEA Member Appreciation Reception.

"I have not met anyone I could not sit down with and discuss any number of issues facing my business or our Industry. Mark Taylor and Bobby Duran have been first class, as well as the whole NARSA/IDEA team. We love the forums on the website, the Solder & Soot podcast, and the NARSA Spring Conference in Houston this year put on by the Hart family was an incredible experience. All this praise initially came from a skeptical phone call we made 1.5 years ago."

When asked if there were any big lessons learned from the early stages of starting a business, both Slater and Burton simply said, "Go for it."

"Personally, I am for anyone or any organization that would want to open or sustain any blue collar service,



rebuild, or repair business that benefits their local market," said Slater. "Being in any skilled trades industry right now is a very rewarding time. If you can laser focus into an area of expertise, you can command a premium that is fair for whatever market you are trying to target. Plus, you have the added benefit of feeling good about your business at the



end of a long day, because you add value to your community and help your fellow blue collar professionals put food on the table for their families and employees' families."

What's next for Chesapeake Cooling Solutions? Burton and Slater would like to open one location per year moving forward and continuing to build a good reputation. "I would love to have four or five locations rockin' and rollin' and expanding," said Burton. Chesapeake Cooling will be introducing several new departments in 2023. These departments will revolve around new Thermal, Electrical, and Diesel offerings. Chesapeake Cooling also wants to increase its Box sales.

"We want to be king of the dying businesses," Nick Slater joked. "A lot of these businesses are dying off because a lot of the talent that's in our industry are 70-80 years old. Ryan and I probably have 20 more years of doing this. We feel we are a special breed, and we can bring a lot of value to a lot of preexisting shops that are around the Mid-Atlantic currently."

"We want to keep the businesses tight with excellent employees with excellent staffing and excellent processes and slowly build a footprint in this industry," said Slater. "The EV Industries Cooling challenges also intrigue us. We will be closely monitoring how this Industry works with the aftermarket community in the future. Technology never moves

backwards, so it is important if you are planning another 20 years in this Industry like Ryan and I are to see where every and all opportunities are. Monitoring potential opportunities for fixing, refurbishing or selling cooling parts to the EV industry may be something we have to look hard into."

Ultimately, what lies at the heart of Chesapeake Cooling Solutions is both Burton and Slater's passion for their work and being an integral part of their community. "I really believe the blue-collar industry has the best people in the world. It's industrial contractors, it's crane operators," said Slater. "One of these days I may get burned out with a Sunday 2:00 a.m. phone call, but it makes me happy that someone needs a service that I can offer them. That's what it's all about."

"There's an extreme sense of gratification when someone comes in and needs something cleaned, and you're able to turn it out around in a day and help them make a living," said Burton. "Seeing that response is what makes it all worthwhile." ■