



Nick Halfman, left, is director of sales, and John Mortensen, is president of Jones Sign Company, which will mark its 100th anniversary next year. The company has created signage that can be seen around the country at places such as Camp Randall Stadium in Madison; Coastal Grand in Myrtle Beach, S.C.; and Charlotte Arena in Charlotte, N.C. The Business News photo by Matt Becker

Jones has made signs for the times since 1910

Clients across the U.S. have used company to make large statements

By Vikki Baumler

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Think for a moment all the changes a person can witness in 100 years – from advances in technology and communication, to evolutions in infrastructure, transportation, laws and politics. Think of the stories one could tell. If only we all could tap into the experience gained from 100 years, as a person or as a business. One De Pere-based company can — as it peers over the edge of its 100th anniversary.

Founded in 1910 by Andrew Jones, Jones Sign Company, just west of De Pere at 1711 Scheuring Rd., has been in the business of making bold statements for 99-plus years.

Today, John Mortensen, who purchased the business in 1982, leads Jones Sign Co. Mortensen has more than 34 years of specialized knowledge and skill in visual communications. “Jones Sign is an outstanding example of the craftsman culture of Northeastern Wisconsin extending its reach across the country,” Mortensen said.

You can see Jones’ bold statement — a larger than life neon-lit sign from Highway 41. The sign flanks a newly-expanded facility that’s total size tops 210,000 square feet. (The addition resulted in roughly another 105,000.)

Jones Sign has clients throughout the United States, some in the Cayman Islands, Mexico and Canada. Eight experienced installation teams oversee off-site projects. “The fact that those customers chose Jones over the local sign

companies says a lot about the creativity, work ethic and quality of our work force. Even with freight and travel, we compete well everywhere,” Mortensen said.

“It’s one of the advantages we have,” said Nick Halfman, director of sales and design, “We have 99 years of experience and feedback on installing the signs we make. Our install team is incredible. Every time we do it, we still learn something new about how we can do it better. We’ve become known as a national sign company, but we want to make sure people understand we have been building, installing and servicing signs locally since the early 1900s – and we are committed to continuing to provide these services locally.”

With more than 150 employees on staff, Jones also incorporates the breadth of knowledge required to get the job done right. For example, its in-house permitting department helps every customer cross their t’s and dot their i’s, ensuring adherence to any municipality or Department of Transportation guidelines.

Innovation and change line the culture at Jones Sign. Whether working with LED, architectural signage or Neon, Jones Sign works to step outside the light box to create signs that attract attention.

In fact, one current project calls for a sign with a digitally-printed face that is 35 feet tall and 25 feet wide.

“Our design and engineering departments are creating cutting-edge signage that really is advertising. Many of our pieces move beyond signage and become landmarks,” Halfman said.

Perhaps all the changes Jones Sign has seen bred a sense of adventure and led it to creating digital signage. According to Halfman,

Jones/Two neon artists are on the staff

From Page 5

Jones currently owns all the digital signage along Highway 41 from Brown through Winnebago counties.

True to its local roots, Jones supported more than 65 nonprofit businesses during 2008 by providing free space on its digital signs.

Experience also comes in big numbers at Jones. Some fabricators have more than 30 years experience. Shop supervisors have 15 to 20 years under their belts.

"We have a commitment to produce the best product for our customers and we do that by retaining the best people in the industry," Halfman said.

Jones Sign's staff includes two neon artists, Max Wetzel and Mike Menucci, with more than 40 years experience between them.

"Neon is kind of a dying breed, but we have the best of both worlds," Wetzel said. "We have two world-class neon artists — and we have the newest technology — the very best equipment to

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make sure that neon lasts. One of the great things about neon is if it's done properly, neon can last almost forever."

Hand-formed and perfected, neon lends itself to some very creative signage. "You can literally draw anything, and we can create it in neon because we can bend it to almost any shape we want to," Wetzel said.

Neon tubes offer 360 degrees of light, whereas

an LED application offers more of a directional light source, much like a flashlight. Of course, Halfman points out that both sign types have strengths, and that's where Jones' experience once again comes into play.

"We work very hard with our design team to look at the best applications," he said. "Sometimes, signs are lit with neon and no one knows it because it's encased in the sign. There really is a science to lighting a sign properly. Unfortunately, a lot of that hard work goes unseen due the sign structure."

Another strong point of neon is the ability to restore some original mementos or vintage signs. "We had a customer who had a sign that was in his family business for years, and we were able to repair and restore the neon for him," Wetzel said.

Wetzel's passion for the art and the long tenures of many Jones employees help keep the engine running smoothly as it nears its 100th anniversary, and Mortenson plans on keeping it that way.

"Today," he said, "we want to be the best sign company in the nation, in the judgment of our customers."