

Lou Dzierzak

FenderTrender

The Little Company That Could: How Valtek turned fire truck repair and refurbishing into a five-alarm success.

FROM THE OUTSET, BRIAN VESLEY and his partners decided to focus on heavy-duty vehicles. "We wanted to do something a little different from what other people were doing. It didn't make sense to get in the middle of a crowded field and do one better than everybody else," Vesley explained.

Thus, Valtek, Inc. was launched in Paterson, New Jersey in 1993 with a focus on refinishing and body work for buses, trucks and commercial vehicles. Then along came fire trucks.

"Emergency equipment people have to maintain their vehicles in proper operating shape and they like to not only keep them functioning well but they like to maintain their appearance. We found that to be a good fit for our interests and talents," Vesley said.

To date, more than 140 municipalities in New Jersey and New York have hired Valtek to repair or refurbish

their emergency vehicles. The word of mouth wherever fire chiefs gather is part of the success, or course. "Individual fire departments are kind of idiosyncratic," he said. "They have their own personalities and concerns. Some departments have strict rules requiring new equipment every eight years. Other departments maintain a piece of equipment for twenty years. Their needs are different and we service both of them," he said.

This can require some customized problem solving, of course. Repairing and refurbishing the big rigs isn't as easy as calling the local dealer and asking him to send over a new fender. "Very often there is a need to actually fabricate parts because they may take too long to produce at the factory or the model is obsolete or the manufacturer has gone out of business,"

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he said. "One of the obvious signs of a neophyte insurance appraiser is someone who writes up a fire truck and lists alternate or aftermarket parts. There's no such thing."

City managers, too, may need a little education to help them accurately evaluate competing bids. "The general rule in the government marketplace is lowest price wins. Lowest bidders often do not accurately assess the size of the job and the time and costs required to complete the project," he said. Vesley and his team rely on hands on experience gained over time. "There's a lot of knowledge that has to be gained by understanding the equipment and what it's being put through to accurately estimate the work and actually perform it," explained Vesley.

Close color matching is also a challenge. Repainting an entire side to match a repaired door, for instance, is prohibitive; fire trucks are often heavily decorated with gold leaf and graphics. And then there's the not-so-little problem of trying to match the color red. "There's no such thing as fire truck red," said Vesley, who sees red regularly. "There are about a million of them." ⚙️



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