

BUSINESS

Rihm Kenworth

The Rihm Kenworth story dates back several decades. From building vintage semi-trucks to managing today's high-tech machinery, the Rihm Kenworth partnership has gone through evolutions of change much like its business since it was first established in 1949. John B Rihm (J.B.) was working for a Ford dealer in the 1930s. During the Great Depression, J.B. went against the odds and opened his own business, Rihm Motor Company, known for auto repair. Kari Rihm, relative, says, "I like to imagine that he had a foresight, even in the depth of the depression that better days were coming, that things were going to improve in this country." Business grew slowly for several years, then Rihm had an opportunity. He met with representatives of Kenworth Truck Company and they offered up a challenge: sell four trucks in Mexico. The challenge was accepted by Rihm, the trucks were sold, and it started the beginning of a 65+ year partnership which became Rihm Kenworth. A large state-of-the-art facility was built in 1949 and it became the first dealer east of the Mississippi River to specialize in truck repair.

For decades, generations of Rihms operated the business, and third generation, John W. Rihm worked the family business for 42 years, first washing trucks, then working his way up to President and Owner of the company. John W. Rihm passed away in 2010, which left his wife Kari to continue on as the company's leader. John's son, named after his great-grandfather, J. B. Rihm, II, has also joined the company, keeping the strong legacy going. Kari Rihm says, "When I came on, I decided I have to grow this business. A lot of that was getting out of the 1949 building."

As of spring 2018, Rihm Kenworth has two new state-of-the-art buildings in the Twin Cities metro area, one in Coon Rapids. Recently celebrating the business's grand opening, Kari Rihm says Coon Rapids was a great fit thanks to the willingness of City officials to listen to their project needs, the open land available in the city's industrial park and the great visibility from Hwy 610. All of these attributes fit well with their business strategy to build north of Minneapolis. Rihm Kenworth has five other dealerships around the state in addition to the Coon Rapids facility.

Knowing the long periods of time truckers spend away from home, Rihm and her team have kept the average trucker's needs in mind throughout the building process. The Coon Rapids facility includes a body shop that is capable of collision repair and alignment right on-site, as well as a paint booth that can accommodate anything from a truck to an RV. While truckers wait for their repairs, there is a customer lounge, laundry services, guest offices with Wi-Fi so they can work and showers in the restrooms. "I love to remind people that without the trucking industry, the economy in this country would come to a screeching halt. The ability to deliver any kind of goods comes from a truck at some point." Rihm says, "We are in the business to help business."

Quick Facts:

- » Address: 9400 Evergreen Blvd.
- » 60+ employees currently and still hiring
- » According to James O'Brien, General Manager of the Coon Rapids Rihm Kenworth location, "Trucks that are compliant with the latest EPA emissions guidelines are the cleanest diesel engines ever. The air coming out of a 2017-built truck is cleaner than the air going into it, which is healthier and safer for everyone."

