



History of AIS Industrial and Construction Supply

Maybe the legacy of Paul “Chris” Christensen is this: Do whatever it takes to get the job done. It’s something he learned to do from an early age – and not in the best of circumstances. Family life for Chris at age 12 was very tough but he learned to rely on himself and he never complained



Paul J. Christensen (age 3) bottom left

Yes, whatever it takes ... to make it through.

By age 16 Chris would leave his home in Iowa for Denver just before the Great Depression where he took on odd jobs: an usher in a movie theater and an elevator operator, all while attending high school and then Barnes Business College. After graduating, he sold adding machines where he fine-tuned his people skills (many remember him as charismatic with an undeniable charm). Ultimately he landed a job as a comptroller in the general

accounting office of the U.S. government during World War II where he audited airlines at Stapleton Airport in Denver.

Search deeply enough into the pasts of all great businesspeople and you’ll undoubtedly find a distinct moment in time when they saw an opportunity and then seized on it with relentless zeal – all hurdles be damned.

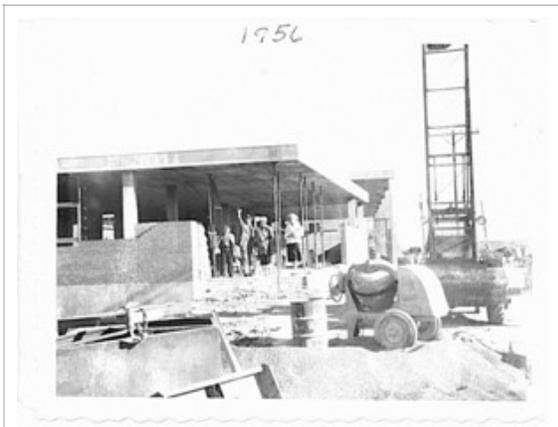
After World War II, planes were being retrofitted from the military for commercial use at Stapleton. To Chris, the opportunity was as clear as a Colorado blue sky. And it would turn into a life-long business and much more.

It was 1945 the birth of Aviation Service Supply Company to furnish those changing airlines with essentially anything they needed. And Chris coddled it like a baby in those early days, spending countless hours tending to details, buying buildings and leasing them back to the business and nurturing the budding customer relationships.



He wasn't immune to hard work. The story goes that at age nine, he worked in a dairy - paid with milk. But soon, the manager grew impressed enough with Chris's work ethic that he started paying him a small wage.

That work ethic matured with time and Chris proved it by laying the foundation (quite literally) for his new business when he bought the land in 1952 that the company now rests on even to this day.



3900 Ulster St Building Main Entrance 1956



3900 Ulster St Building South Dock 1956

And by 1963, Chris took charge, buying enough stock to become the majority owner and raising the company to new heights.

“He never took much money out of the company; he really sacrificed a lot to keep it going, he was always willing to live on a shoestring,” says Dale Hahs II, AIS's CEO today and Chris's grandson.

When he wasn't working, you'd likely find him golfing. He developed a deep enthusiasm for the sport at a young age and joined the Cherry Hills Country Club (he was a member there for 30 years) and played regularly on the golf team.

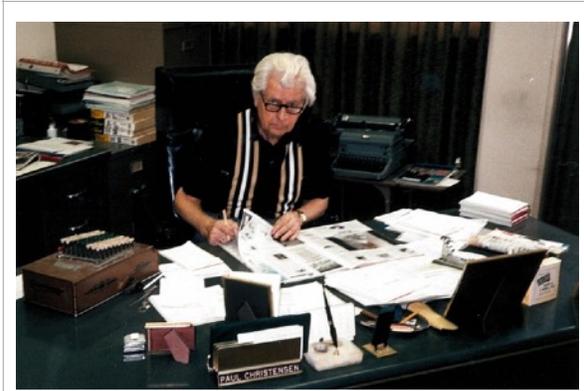
Dale explains Chris's passion for golf likely stemmed from his equal passion for business. “I think there are parallels: golf is a great challenge and so is business. And you take risks in golf and you take risks in business. He loved both and he often talked with others about how to improve his golf and his business. He enjoyed the risks that came along with both, when everything was on the line.”



Paul J. Christensen
Age 14



Indeed, his passion and those risks paid off handsomely. By every measure, Chris served as a competent captain steering AIS through the mid and part of the latter 20th century with the personal touch: face-to-face time along with steady and meaningful handshakes.



Paul J. Christensen 1985

He also made the company flexible enough to adapt to the ever-changing winds of business. As the need for aviation supply waned, Chris's son Coby helped to transition the company to other sectors. One example was a move into the ski industry during the 1970s. When Coby learned the Hansen Ski Boot was having trouble finding a mold release it needed to make their boots, Coby found the mold release and ended up supplying about three drums of it a week. And when Head Ski in Boulder needed aluminum oxide for manufacturing, AIS was there.

And of course AIS has since moved heavily into an even broader customer base that

now includes the industrial and construction industries.

Despite the expansion and move out of aviation, Chris kept the company's name the same, but he eventually grew tired of explaining to callers that he didn't fix airplanes or sell aircraft related products. So he changed the name to Aviation Industrial Supply. And in 2011, it changed again to AIS Industrial & Construction Supply.

Chris retired in 1977 but still came to work almost daily until 1986 when cancer took him. But the cancer didn't take his undeniable legacy of hard work, determination and unquestionable character. And yes, his legacy of doing whatever it takes.

It's a legacy that has only grown stronger and more robust since the 1980s. Chris's son, Coby, took over the presidential reins, holding the founding principles firmly in his grasp.



Three generations of AIS leaders, Dale (1), Chris (51) and Coby (18)



At the turn of the century, AIS fashioned a number of advancements. In 1999, it joined Affiliated Distributors, the industrial supply industry's largest wholesale buying and marketing group in North America. It was a move that gave AIS unprecedented buying power so it could offer its customers even lower prices that are competitive with—and sometimes beat—national chain prices.

“It’s a huge network that gave us the chance to learn from other distributors and it really allowed me to grow personally as a leader at the company,” Hahs says.

In 2000, AIS entered the tool repair business. “We got a request from a customer to repair some tools and we’ve slowly become an expert at this – it’s a move that’s also helped us grow our tool sales,” Hahs says.

Then in 2001 AIS opened a branch in Silt, Colo, near Glenwood Springs that serves the mines, oil and gas industries. Hahs explains the branch manager Mike McCorkle treats it like it’s his own company.

“We live and die by the people who work for us, and their creativity and innovation have clearly helped make this the company it is today.”

By 2006, the company began taking advantage of the internet selling products on eBay. Today AIS sells about \$500,000 worth of goods annually on the site, and it has had more than 10,000 transactions with a 100 percent satisfaction rating.

And in 2008, the company expanded its showroom from 1,500 square feet to 4,000. Hahs says he often hears manufacturer reps say it’s one of the best they’ve ever seen. “We realized our customers like to touch and feel the products and our showroom lets them do exactly that.”



Today, AIS is home to more than 200,000 SKUs – everything from ladders to safety gear and school lockers to the best-made tools anywhere. We’re about offering all the advantages of the big box stores, but with the service you expect from a smaller independent. Hence our slogan: **“Think Outside the Big Box.”**

But perhaps what has caused AIS to outlast all of its competitors over the last eight decades (yes, AIS is the only independent still operating in the state) is Chris’s ever-lasting influence—the realization that action speaks louder than any words and that business is about doing whatever it takes.

Here’s one example of hundreds: At about 9 a.m. on a day during a massive December Colorado snowstorm in 2006, a client (a



local refinery) called to ask if AIS could provide bedding and cots for 200 employees who'd be snowed in at their worksite by that evening. AIS replied with its common, "Of course," even though employees were celebrating in the middle of the annual Christmas party. By noon, the snow was so heavy most businesses were sending their employees home. Clif with AIS ended up talking the delivery guy into getting the cots to AIS, and yes, AIS delivered the cots by 7 p.m. despite three-foot snow drifts on the roads.

Whatever it takes.

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