

Navien Takes Top North American Contractors to South Korea



Weeklong trip with Navien Rewards installers takes in world's largest single boiler plant, plus three Winter Olympics events.

By Steve Smith

Navien took its top North American contractors for a trip to South Korea, Feb. 18-24, which included two days at the Winter Olympics.

It marked the first time Navien took contractors to the international company's home base. In this case, eight "All Stars" and their guests were chosen as a result of selling the most products through the Navien Rewards loyalty program. (Two years ago, the company treated a select group of U.S. and Canadian distributors for a similar extensive trip also for the first time.)

The combination of corporate presentations and Korean hospitality underscored the company's long commitment to wholesale distribution and professional installation — a commitment that helped Navien celebrate 1 million condensing units sold in North America as of earlier this year.

Seotan Factory

The business highlight of the trip occurred on Feb. 19, the first full day, for a trip to the company's factory in Seotan, about a 90-minute drive from Seoul. The company bills the site as the single largest boiler manufacturing plant in the world.

"When I get back and say to customers that I saw this product built and describe all the work that I saw that goes into not just putting it all together, but how they

inspect every unit made, that's going to make a huge difference in selling more equipment," said Eric Silva, who runs Silva Mechanical outside of Detroit.

The thorough tour included all aspects of production and inspection, as well as an impressive automated warehouse with robots moving up and down tracks between narrow aisles either placing or picking for shipment products on racks that stretched up to 30 feet high.

"The fact that literally everything in the box is made right in the factory and doesn't come from any third-party meant a lot," said Greg Hunsicker, who owns McElroy's Plumbing, Topeka, Kansas.

Hunsicker sold about 70 Navien products last year, including a boiler he strapped behind him in the cockpit of his acrobatic plane that he then piloted to the jobsite.

"They have total control of their equipment," Hunsicker said. "And that way, if the company needs to make any changes, they can do it almost on the spot rather than waiting months for some other company to figure out how to make a component."

The factory image accompanying this article came directly from Navien since we weren't allowed to take any ourselves. But suffice to say, the inspection process in which the company inspects every one of the 2 million units it produces annually was a highlight for the installers.

Navien



Aaron Bond and Ashley Harding, Accuserve Heating and Air Conditioning, Toronto, outside the Gyeongbokgung Palace in Seoul.

problems. With a cascade system, you have many units working in tandem. If there is a problem with one, then you've got that many more that can still deliver until you fix the problem."

If the contractors didn't know the international scope of Navien, they definitely did by the end of the day. Before an hour-long walk through the sprawling complex, the contractors heard presentations presided over by Jaeyong Lee, managing director of Navien's global business division.

Lee and his Navien colleagues described the other markets, including Russia, China and the UK that are other bright spots for the company. We've been to these presentations before, but never seen a company provide

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a wealth of sales and marketing data before, and with every PowerPoint slide marked "Confidential" in the upper right hand corner, we can't say much. Let's just add that the sales figure for China looks like a rocket launch.

After lunch, the group took a look at a historical display of the company's achievement over the decades for a business that started out mining coal in 1978. It was yet another stop that got the group talking in particular about the number of products it makes for sales outside of North America.

One intriguing product combined heat and power by creating its own electricity with what's called a Stirling engine that essentially uses a piston to compress and expand air or another gas at different temperatures. The system is perfect for smaller homes commonly found in Asia, but wouldn't generate nearly enough electricity to



power a North American home.

We imagine the crew would have gladly headed home afterward that didn't see us return to our hotel until 8 p.m.

However, we were just getting started on the trip that included memorable lunches and dinners and Korean culture including a tour of a folk village in which one building incorporated a traditional ondol, a form of radiant heat; Nanta, a popular drumming show, the Nakasna Temple, a Buddhist center established in 671 and the Gyeongbokgung Palace, built in 1395.

And if that wasn't good enough, the group traveled to PyeongChang, a three-hour drive from Seoul, and watched three Winter Olympics, including a quarter final hockey match between Norway and OAR; the half-pipe freestyle skiing final; and short track skating, including the men's 500 meter final. Trust us when we say that short track skating is the World Series rolled into the Super Bowl for South Koreans.

"The hospitality everyone showed us was absolutely amazing," said Duke Gutierrez, Duke's Plumbing, Reno, Nevada. He brought his son, Giovanni, along for the trip. "Gio is the future of the company, so for him to see all this while he's still young and learning was a great part of the experience for me." ●