

A CHANGE FOR THE BETTER

Company that rents musical instruments finds a way to clean them more efficiently.

By RUTH BAUM BIGUS
Special to the Star

Company: Meyer Music Inc. is family owned and rents and sells band and orchestra instruments. Meyer Music offers private music lessons and sells digital and acoustic pianos, organs, sheet music and other supplies. Clients include institutional customers, primarily school districts including Lawrence, Blue Springs, Blue Valley and Olathe, and the University of Kansas.

Address: Meyer Music's main location is 1512 W. U.S. 40 in Blue Springs; its two other locations are in Kansas City, North, and Overland Park.

Phone: 816-228-5656

Web site: www.meyermusic.com

Number of employees: About 50 among its three stores and an additional 150 professional teachers on independent contract.



TAMMY LJUNGBLAD | THE KANSAS CITY STAR

After four minutes in a new ultrasonic cleaning tank, a sparkling clean instrument emerges. Jon Gregory oversees the new process at Meyer Music Inc. in Blue Springs.

Ownership, top management: Ted and Betty Meyer own the business; three of their grown

children are involved. Son Tom Meyer operates the Blue Springs location and is director of marketing and oversees the

SEE EQUIPMENT | D12

FROM D11

band and orchestra division; son Mike Meyer manages the Overland Park store; and daughter Mitzi Meyer Phelan manages the Kansas City, North, operation.

Challenge: How to efficiently clean brass instruments.

Background: When Meyer Music opened 44 years ago, it was focused on the sale of acoustic and later digital pianos. Over the years, the company got into the rental and sale of band and orchestra instruments. Today, Tom Meyer said the company has 5,000 instruments in stock with a "substantial" amount being rented annually. Thousands of instruments are rented during the course of the school year. At the end of the academic year, instruments are returned.

"We see to it that the instrument is cleaned inside and out so it's secure to rent again," Meyer said. Summertime is also when repairs are made to many instruments.

For years, Meyer Music used a local couple to clean its instruments by hand.

"Over the last several years they basically said, 'We can't keep up with your growth,'" Meyer said. "For us, it all has to be done between Memorial Day and Aug. 15."

So, the company needed to find a way to process the cleaning of the instruments more quickly and efficiently.

Action: Searching the Internet, Meyer found some local musical dealers that used an ultrasonic cleaning method that saved time and money. However, Meyer was concerned about using another dealer to clean its instruments.

"We found it was not feasible from an economic standpoint to send out our cleaning work,"

Meyer said.

So Meyer found a company that makes the cleaning equipment, Ultrasonic Power Corp. in Freeport, Ill., and figured it would be worthwhile to buy a 135-gallon tub machine. The model he bought cost about \$20,000.

"You fill the thing with water and add the biodegradable solution and the instruments, which have been taken apart, and put the pieces into the stainless steel basket," Meyer said. The tub can hold 15 trumpets at one time, depending on their size, and has a four-minute wash cycle.

The parts do have to be reassembled and lubricated by hand.

Meyer added one employee — a brass professor from the University of Central Missouri at Warrensburg — to operate the equipment. He attended a weekend training at Ultrasonic headquarters to learn the ins and outs of the equipment and how it worked. The Meyers refurbished a room at the Blue Springs location to accommodate the equipment.

"It has new lighting and workbenches to hold the instruments," he said.

The Meyers installed the equipment in December, "so we were ready to go when the busy season hit," Meyer said.

Results: Meyer said having the ultrasonic cleaning equipment in house has worked well. The instruments are cleaned better and faster, and the cleaning also has brought in other business.

"We ended up with quite a bit of summer repair work because of it," Meyer said. "It's saving us time and it's more efficient than doing it by hand. ...

"I think it's paid for itself already."



TAMMY LJUNGBLAD | THE KANSAS CITY STAR

After being cleaned in a new ultrasonic cleaning tank, this brass trumpet was polished by hand at Meyer Music Inc. in Blue Springs.