

# NINETY YEARS OF SUCCESS

By Sarah Achenbach

**WHEN HURRICANE KATRINA** hit the Gulf Coast last September, Richard L. Goodall (R.L.), CEO of Dixon Valve & Coupling Company, Inc., knew exactly what his company's response should be. After all, the decision had been nearly 90 years in the making.



March 21, 1916  
H.W. Goodall founds Dixon  
Valve & Coupling Co.



1929  
Dixon moves its headquarters to Hancock  
and Columbia Avenues in Philadelphia.



1934  
Dixon opens locations in  
Canada, called Dixon Limited



1940  
Acquires the Mulconroy Co.

World War II  
Nearly 100 percent of Dixon production  
goes toward military contracts

"At Dixon, we have always done whatever it takes to get the job done," says Goodall of the philosophy with which his grandfather, H.W. Goodall, founded Dixon in 1916. "For many of our products, we're the only manufacturer in the United States," explains Goodall of Dixon's 200-plus individual product lines. "We went 24/7 for a month."

R.L. Goodall, his brother Douglas, longtime head of manufacturing and engineering at Dixon, and other administration and staff joined factory employees on the assembly lines, with many executives doing nine-hour shifts working machine tools and assembling clamps to meet the demand surge for Gulf Coast recovery efforts.

Celebrating its 90th anniversary this year, Dixon Valve & Coupling has grown from a small Philadelphia factory to an international company.

Headquartered in Chestertown, Md., with distribution centers around the globe, Dixon is the leading innovator in the hose and coupling industry. But the heart of the company and its 90-year success story is the work ethic and founding philosophy of the man who created Dixon—a vision and drive that still inspire the men and women of Dixon today.

In 1887, with an eighth-grade education, 15-year-old H.W. Goodall quit school to take a job as a general clerk and errand boy for Philadelphia rubber distributor Latta &

Mulconroy Co. As the son of a cabinetmaker, he loved to tinker and was soon designing hose couplings and clamps as accessories to Latta & Mulconroy's hose line. With Mr. Mulconroy's blessing, H.W. promoted the new couplings to a few accounts. When H.W. requested permission to introduce his products to the region's leather tanning industry, Mr. Latta refused and dismissed the young man.

H.W. didn't lose a step. He founded the Goodall Rubber Co. and the Knox Manufacturing Co. to manufacture and sell hose and couplings. For him, product development and customer service intertwined as he crisscrossed the country, visiting every major construction site he could locate, identifying its hose and coupling needs, and then manufacturing the necessary products. On March 21, 1916, armed with firsthand knowledge of the needs of the United States' growing mining, oil, drilling, construction and railroad industries, H.W. founded Dixon Valve & Coupling Co. in Philadelphia. Eight years later, urged to slow down for health reasons, H.W. sold the Goodall Rubber Co.—he previously had sold the Knox Co.—to concentrate exclusively on Dixon.

"We conduct our business with the six pillars of character—respect, responsibility, caring, citizenship, trustworthiness and fairness," explains Douglas Goodall. "My grandfather and father, R.B. Goodall, may not have used the same

**1950s**

Pioneers use of non-metallic hose fittings with Tuff-Lite line of nylon fittings



**1974**

Partners with a leading manufacturer of wormgear clamps to sell its products. First major products sold by but not designed or manufactured by Dixon

**1976**

Moves headquarters from Philadelphia to Chestertown, Md.

**1951**

Founder H.W. Goodall dies. R.B. Goodall becomes president and chief operating officer

**1960s and 1970s**

Adds branch locations throughout the United States to provide overnight service to customers and a custom computer system for distribution and shipping.

**1975**

Purchased Adflow (England), now Dixon Group Europe Ltd.





words, but they set the foundation. Both men were great salesmen and motivators.”

In 1951, H.W. died shortly after becoming ill during a West Coast sales trip. R.B. then became president and chief operating officer until his official retirement in 1988 (he remained active in the company until 1993). Sons Richard and Douglas took over to become the third generation to lead Dixon. The week of R.B.’s death in 1994, R.L. Goodall recalls writing down two words that inspired his father and his father before him to lead Dixon: listen and encourage. “Dad listened to every one of his employees,” recalls Goodall. “Our people are absolutely terrific, and they stay with Dixon because they know they are valued.” From the factory to the front office, numerous Dixon employees have long tenures with the company. “We sit down quarterly with every employee in small groups to talk about the Dixon values system and to get ideas and feedback,” he says. “Every person is a huge part of Dixon’s success.”

In 2001, Lou Farina was named president, the company’s first non-family member to hold the position. A second-generation Dixon employee, Farina joined Dixon in 1959 to work in the mailroom. His father, Louis, had worked at Dixon since 1931 and, in the early days of distribution, would deliver orders to the Post Office by

pulling a small wagon. In the 1960s, the younger Farina helped Dixon reach its customers overnight—unheard of at the time—by taking packages to the Philadelphia Greyhound bus station for shipping. Today, products are never more than 24 hours from customers with warehouses around the world. “We have the best products out there, but it’s our commitment to customers that sets us apart,” says Farina.

Dixon has introduced industry “firsts” from a high-pressure rotary hose coupling used for oil drilling to non-metallic Tuff-Lite hose fittings now standard in the agricultural, food and medical industries. In 1940, Dixon’s first acquisition came with a bit of irony when it purchased the Mulconroy Co., formerly the Latta & Mulconroy Co., H.W.’s first employer. Since then, Dixon has strategically expanded its markets and product line by acquiring companies and by creating new divisions.

“H.W. Goodall wouldn’t have dreamed of how far Dixon has come,” muses Richard Flaherty, president of sales and marketing. But with each new innovation, the Dixon philosophy has remained steadfast. “We strive to be easy to do business with and, at the same time, to be better at it than anyone else,” Flaherty says. “For some companies, that’s lip service, but for us, it’s what we do every day.”

