

Business celebrates 100 years of service

Jim McDonald quickly concedes that his family's plumbing and heating company is a rarity in Silicon Valley.

"There aren't too many fourth-generation, family-run, 100-year-old businesses in San Jose," he said Tuesday.

But few companies can change the way that O.C. McDonald has since Oren Charles McDonald founded it in 1906. The company's West San Carlos Street store-front and "Oh See!" neon sign ooze with small-town charm. But the client list on its website is a Silicon Valley directory, with names like NASA, Intel, San Jose State University and Applied Materials.

"It's something knowing that they've been able to evolve from doing air conditioning to high-tech, clean-room construction," said San Jose City Councilman Ken Yeager, who gave a commendation last week to mark the centennial. "That's how they've been able to stay in business."

McDonald, 46, took over as president about 15 years ago when his father, Dick, retired. He made changes to modernize the company's methods and bring it into the computer age.

"I kind of came in and blew up a lot of things that we did," he said. "We started focusing more on the high-tech work."

It's obviously paid off. McDonald hopes to hold a barbecue this summer for employees, neighbors and longtime customers, but then it's back to preparing for the next 100 years.

"I've always looked to the future," McDonald said. "If there's something useful to learn from the past, that's good, but tomorrow's where it's at. Today and tomorrow."