



MATT KRYGER / The Star

COOL JOBS: Jim Shaffner (left) and grandson Jimmy bag ice in the freezer at Penguin Ice. The upstart ice business runs out of the Enterprise Business Center. The company produces about 40 tons of ice per day.

Second time is twice as nice for ice maker

Veteran returns to industry running small Indy operation

By Meagan Ingerson

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Scott Beil stands at the back of the serpentine business park on the Eastside, his back to the sun. It's not yet noon, and the temperature has almost hit 80. He's sweating slightly, but for a man in the ice business, that's a blessing.

"This?" he says, nodding at the sun to his back. "This is what we need."

After a rainy, temperate June, Penguin Ice Co. and other Indianapolis ice manufacturers should experience a boom starting with the Fourth of July. The holiday is usually the biggest single day for the ice business, Beil says, with increased sales lasting through August.

Beil, 42, with his shaggy blond hair, looks more surfer than ice king. But he has worked in the industry since he was 15, when he got his first job as an assistant to a delivery driver. By 18, he was bagging and delivering ice on his own.

It was all part of the family

business. His father, Daniel Beil, bought Redbud City Ice Co. in Anderson in 1975, according to the Indiana Historical Society. Daniel Beil continued to buy other ice businesses across the state. In 1988, he purchased Polar Ice Co., founded in 1892.

After Scott Beil bought the company from his father in 1998, Polar Ice expanded into Kentucky, Michigan and Ohio, and was selling 17 million bags each year. Beil sold the company in 2000 to Cincinnati-based Home City Ice, which manufactures and distributes ice across the Midwest.

"At the time, it was just a good business decision," Beil says of the sale.

But after taking a break from the industry, Beil says he opened Penguin Ice in 2006 to give Home City Ice a bit of competition. At the time, Home City was the only major ice company in Indiana.

RETURN TO THE COLD: Scott Beil sold family business Polar Ice in 2000; he began Penguin Ice in 2006.

PENGUIN ICE CO.

- » **FOUNDED:** 2006
- » **OWNER:** Scott Beil
- » **LOCATION:** 55 S. State St.
- » **TONS OF ICE MADE PER DAY:** 40.

THE ICE INDUSTRY

Manufacturers first got into business in the late 19th century, when they would cut ice from frozen lakes and ponds in the winter and store it during the year to fill customers' ice boxes.

Artificial ice plants popped up in the 1890s. With the mass production of the home refrigerator in the 1950s, ice manufacturers focused on selling ice instead to restaurants and hotels, as well as for special occasions.

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Ice

» Penguin was buying from a supplier before building its facility six months ago.

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Now Beil runs his small operation out of the Enterprise Business Center on South State Street. Beil says he has spent about \$1 million in startup costs.

The company produces about 40 tons of ice per day, just a small slice of the 1,000 tons daily that Polar Ice was producing in 2000. But Beil says running the smaller company has been more enjoyable.

“Obviously, the headaches aren’t as big,” he says. “They’re two totally different animals. I always had to worry about fighting off guys like me. (Now) we’re excited to get two stops.”

As Beil gives a tour of his ice factory, housed in a former supermarket warehouse, he shows off the company’s two newly installed 20-ton turbo ice makers. Together the two ice makers produce about 3,200 pounds an hour.

To make such large quantities, the equipment runs nearly 24 hours a day, Beil says.

Tap water is first run through a carbon filter, then fed into the ice makers. The water is frozen for about half an hour in a series of large sheets, each a few inches thick.

Hot gas is used to separate the ice from the plates, releasing the sheets down into a grinder. The ice is then ground into cubes and carried by a conveyor belt to a bagging room. The cubes run through a bagging machine, and the bags are piled on wooden pallets several feet high for delivery.

Before building the facility about six months ago, Beil was buying ice from Cincinnati-based United Dairy Farmers. Now he says he is making all the ice he sells.

Penguin fills about 300 ice boxes at gas stations, convenience stores and groceries around Indianapolis, with Beil



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ICE FOR INDY: Scott Beil’s Penguin Ice has one manufacturing site that supplies 300 ice boxes in the city. Beil says he has spent about \$1 million in startup costs.

set to add a few dozen more boxes that he bought used. Business has gotten better as the Penguin name becomes better known, Beil says.

But Penguin’s growth is limited by geography and the logistics of having only one manufacturing facility, Beil says. The company depends entirely on small sales, while larger grocery chains like Marsh Supermarkets have contracts with the bigger Home City Ice.

“You can only go 60 to 80 miles (to deliver ice),” Beil says. “Why does Wal-Mart want to take five stores and give them to me when Home City’s got 500 of them?”

But surrounded by a field of new boxes waiting for the Penguin Ice label, Beil says the slow approach suits him just fine.

“I’m trying to get every customer I can,” he says. “It’s just more fun.”

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