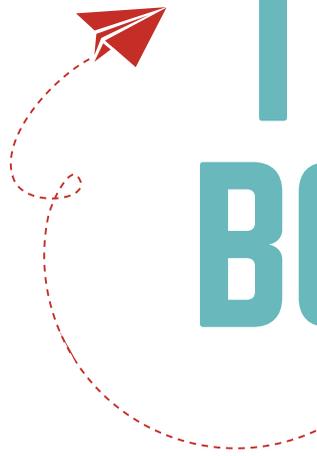


IT'S A BIRD! IT'S A PLANE! IT'S A... BOILER?



**Pilot-plumber
Greg Hunsicker goes
above and beyond for
a family in need.**

When someone goes “above and beyond,” it usually means he or she exceeds normal expectations. But for **Greg Hunsicker**, vice president of McElroy’s Plumbing Heating & Air



Conditioning of Topeka, Kan., and a pilot who owns a small aerobatic airplane, the phrase has dual meaning.

Earlier this year, Hunsicker answered a no-heat call for a family of five in Topeka during the coldest weather the area had experienced all year. The cause: A faulty valve on an aging boiler in one of the oldest homes in the area. The solution: A new boiler.

The problem? The boiler was six hours away in Omaha, Neb., and one more night without heat would almost certainly freeze the pipes within the historic home’s hydronic heating system. And so began a race against time that would put Hunsicker’s skills to the test — both on the ground and in the air.

A CALL FOR HELP

When **Joshua** and **Kimberly Svaty** decided to make the move to Topeka five years ago with their growing family, they were set on purchasing a home with personality and charm. They found just what they were looking for in a sprawling brick home in the Westboro neighborhood of the city.

Photo credit: Greg Hunsicker



Greg Hunsicker, vice president of McElroy's Plumbing Heating & Air Conditioning of Topeka, Kan., used his own personal plane to retrieve a compact Navien NHB series boiler, which is strapped into the seat behind him in this photo, in order to prevent potentially catastrophic damage to a local family's home during a cold snap.

On New Year's Day, as daytime highs hovered in the single digits in Topeka, the Svatys noticed their home was not as warm as it should be, and the inside temperature was dropping. They also soon discovered they had no hot water and placed a frantic call to McElroy's.

"Of course it happens on a holiday, and of course it happens on the one time where we're suddenly staring down the barrel of freezing temps," Svaty says. "We were starting to get nervous, and the kids were getting cold."

"It was the coldest week that we had had all winter when that thing went down," Hunsicker says. "And with all the piping and the air handlers throughout the house, which are ventilated to the outside, they would freeze if we didn't do something. It was very urgent."

They diagnosed the problem as a faulty valve in the 20-year-old boiler.

"McElroy's does a great job, so when they came out to look at it and said, 'You can spend X amount of money on a valve on an older system that's been working alright, or you can spend a little more and just get a new, more efficient boiler and we can go forward from there,' we went with the new boiler."

The moment businesses reopened Jan. 3 after the observed holiday, Hunsicker began calling around to find

The 91-year-old home is "in what people would consider the core of Topeka," Joshua Svaty says. "It is awesome. It was built by a lumber baron, so the woodwork is extraordinary. He also, for whatever reason, built it ridiculously sturdy."

Having only had four owners in its 91-year history, including the Svatys, the home has been well-loved and immaculately maintained through the years. This includes the addition of a sophisticated hydronic heating and cooling system in the 1970s that now includes a combination boiler/hot water system and five air handlers scattered throughout the house.

"This is a home we've taken care of for years," even before the Svatys moved in, Hunsicker says. "They have hot and chilled water throughout the house. Twenty years ago, I took a really old, big, inefficient boiler out and put a new one in, and this is what we just ended up replacing."



Joshua and Kimberly Svaty live in this 91-year-old brick home in the Westboro neighborhood of Topeka. The home has a sophisticated hydronic heating and cooling system installed in the 1970s that now includes a combination boiler/hot water system and five air handlers scattered throughout the house.

IT'S A BIRD! IT'S A PLANE! IT'S A... BOILER?



Hunsicker owns a small aerobatic airplane and lives on an airfield outside of Topeka, Kan. His airplane hangar is heated with a Navien NHB series boiler, so he knew from measuring it at home that it would fit into his airplane (pictured).

a Navien NHB series condensing boiler. He knew from installing one in his own airplane hangar that the boiler would meet the heating and hot water demands of the Svaty home while still fitting in the limited

residential HVAC services and oversees many of the company's 150-plus employees, including his 22-year-old son, **Brit Hunsicker**, dispatched his son to begin tearing out the old boiler.

'YOU ALWAYS APPRECIATE GOOD SERVICE ANYWAY, BUT YOU DON'T BUILD INTO YOUR CONSIDERATION THAT SOMEONE IS GOING TO FLY AND GET A PART FOR YOU.'

physical space he had to work with. He finally found one at a Johnstone Supply, but not a local branch.

"Greg came back and said, 'There's one up in Omaha and I'm actually going to fly up and get it,' and we said, 'Are you kidding me?'" Svaty recalls. "It was cold and it was windy, but he said, 'No problem, I'll be back by mid-morning.'"

"It's a three-hour drive there and a three-hour drive back, but it's a 45-minute ride in my airplane," Hunsicker says. "I told them I'd have their heat back on that day."

UP, UP, AND AWAY

As soon as he found the new boiler in Omaha — and after measuring the inside of his airplane to ensure the new boiler would fit — Hunsicker, who manages all

Meanwhile, Hunsicker double checked the aviation weather across the route and prepared for takeoff. By 9:40 a.m., he was airborne.

"Johnstone Supply had it 10 minutes from the airport, and they said, 'We'll meet you there,'" Hunsicker recalls. "They met me there at the exact right time, unboxed that boiler, strapped it in, and off I went. I was at the airport for maybe 10 minutes."

Hunsicker, whose airpark home is just 20 minutes away from the Svaty job site, delivered the boiler to the family at 12:30 p.m., completed the installation with his son, and had the boiler up and running before nightfall, just as he had promised.

"We couldn't believe it," Svaty says. "You always appreciate good service anyway, but you don't build into your consideration

that someone is going to fly and get a part for you. It made a huge difference in our lives, and we're forever grateful."

HIGH PRAISE

Ann Woodard, senior marketing manager for Navien, first heard about the incident at a training event at the company's Irvine, Calif., headquarters. Hunsicker often uses a GoPro camera to capture his flights on video, and Woodard had seen the evidence.

"The photo of Navien's [NHB series boiler] strapped into the back of Greg's plane seems to be a wonderfully graphic example of what many do to support their customers, especially in a time of need," she says, adding that, while it was unfortunate that local wholesalers did not have the unit in stock, she is pleased the product was compact enough to fit into his plane.

Hunsicker downplayed his actions, saying it's not really that far out of the ordinary for McElroy's to go above and beyond — literally and figuratively — for its customers. Plus, he says, it's a good day when he can combine two things he loves.

"It was nice to be able to do something that not many other people can do," he says. **PM**



Hunsicker knew from installing a NHB in his own airplane hangar that the boiler would meet the heating and hot water demands of the Svaty home while still fitting in the limited physical space he had to work with.