

Benner-Nawman

1925 - 2025



1925

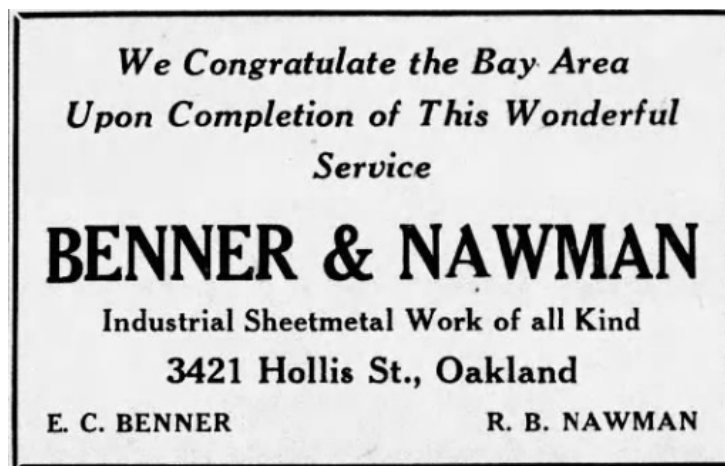
THE  STORY

2025

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January 14, 1939 - Congratulatory ad printed in the Oakland Post-Enquirer, upon the opening of the Golden Gate Bridge, connecting Oakland with San Francisco, across the San Francisco Bay

BENNER-NAWMAN • 100 YEARS

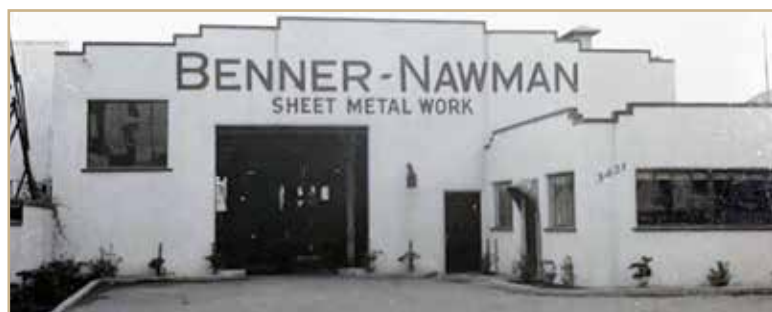
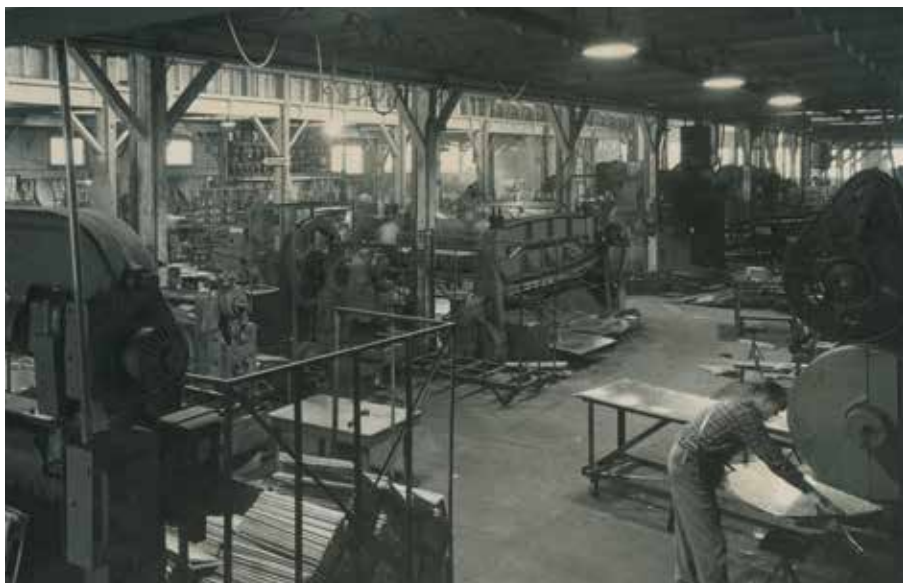
COMPANY FOUNDED - EARLY EXPANSION

FORMING A NEW COMPANY

Ernest C. "Gus" Benner and Rollie Nawman formed a partnership as a sheet metal fabricator in Oakland, CA.

Mr. Benner brought experience from a successful family-owned metal product manufacturing business in Orange County to Oakland, along with high ambition as an entrepreneur.

After meeting Mr. Nawman, a skilled and inventive tinner, "Benner and Nawman" was formed in 1925 as a new business partnership.



[Above, Left] Benner-Nawman grew into an international company from its facility in Oakland (pictured c.1940), which was home to the company from approximately 1935 until 1970.

[Below] Benner-Nawman exhibits a 1/8 scale model of a pallet unloader and stack dumping system, which Rollie Nawman successfully patented by 1955. The system was used to move canned products in quantity, as interstate distribution demands increased.

The company's presence in Oakland had expanded to an entire city block by the end of the Second World War, and incorporated as "Benner-Nawman, Inc." in 1946.

The company made sheet metal products for food processing companies, home heating systems, and fabricated custom equipment for San Francisco Bay-area companies such as Western Electric and IBM.

By the 1950s, Benner-Nawman was producing farm equipment for harvesting crops grown in California's central valleys, and fabricating complex machinery for pharmaceutical production, laboratory equipment, and commercial conveyor and containment systems.



During this time, the company had also engaged with Pacific Telephone and Telegraph, a venture that would have a profound and lasting impact for Benner-Nawman - for the next five decades.

1948 - 1951: RE-INVENTING THE TELEPHONE BOOTH

When we hear the long-standing motto, "Quality Products Engineered with Intelligence and Imagination," used for decades by Benner-Nawman companies... It's easy to envision complex, high-tech gadgets. In the 1940s, however, a "Telephone Booth" hardly resembled the classic glass-and-sheet-metal payphone housing that many of us, over a certain age, recall using to call home - or remember as Superman's modern dressing room, or the inspiration for Bill and Ted's time machine.

Early public telephones date back as far as 1888, and for many years were designed to be ornate, hinted at luxury, and were made of wood. By 1948, Pacific Telephone and Telegraph had determined that wooden enclosures were difficult to install, and lacked weatherproofing demanded by outdoor public pay-telephones. The company approached Benner-Nawman co-founder Rollie Nawman that year, with the challenge to design an durable, and low-maintenance replacement.

Rollie Nawman imagined a new kind of coin-operated pay-telephone, constructed with aluminum, safety glass, and ceramic porcelain-steel panels that would withstand variable weather in the San Francisco Bay area (and extremes seen outside of the region). The B-N telephone booths were manufactured with different color panels that could be interchangeable and replacable.

The "Pacific A" booth was born, which became the first production model (BN150). The new units were more expensive than their wooden predecessors, but proved to be durable; some of the first-generation models were still in use into the 1990s. Benner-Nawman quickly became the largest booth manufacturer in North America, eventually producing phone booths from facilities in Arizona, Illinois, and Alberta, Canada.

[Below] Inventor Rollie Nawman poses with the "Pacific A" telephone booth; this enclosure is the first production model constructed of glass and aluminum (1951).



[Left] The original "Pacific A" (BN150) telephone booth was positioned for years on the front corner of the main office at Benner-Nawman's Oakland, CA facility, where development and early production of the metal-and-glass units took place.

B-N employee Ed Keefe is shown standing inside the phone both, equipped with BN's patented telephone booth directory mount, in 1955.



55 YEARS: INTO THE 21ST CENTURY

Public telephones dotted the landscape of mid-century America and beyond, throughout the 1950s and 1960s. By the late 1980s, Benner-Nawman telephone booths could be found in every US state, and in over 30 countries throughout the world.

Custom designs and specialty products expanded Benner-Nawman's product line from the original "Pacific A" and its related BN150 and BN400 models. New models included numerous indoor and outdoor booths, semi-enclosed "shelters," and even public telephone trailers. The futuristic "porcelain egg" BN800 Vanguard was popular in public areas such as airports and arenas.



[Above] Military installations were among B-N's many customers; a US soldier uses a pay telephone station to call home from Hawaii's Schofield Barracks at Fort Shafter, in 1963.



[Above] Benner-Nawman's colorful 1971 catalog showcases a variety of telephone booths and shelters for indoor and outdoor public spaces.

[Right] Booths and Shelters were often customized for a variety of local and branding needs. The University of Texas - El Paso installed the BN800 Vanguard with custom logos throughout the school's athletic facilities in the 1970s.



On September 30, 2005, Benner-Nawman assembled the last of more than 600,000 telephone booths manufactured by the company. Rollie Nawman's innovative revisioning of the public telephone would have a presence throughout the globe, as far away as Hong Kong, the United Arab Emirates - and even the tiny Indian Ocean island nation, The Maldives.

The end of production in 2005 represented the end of a defining era for B-N. Although telecommunication was only one of numerous industries served by the company, it remains a vital and proud part of the Benner-Nawman legacy.



[Left] Santa's Village in Santa Cruz, CA featured candy cane style posts in combination with the popular BN858 telephone shelter model in the early 1960s, serving visitors and Santa's elves alike.

The BN858 provided privacy and protection from the elements, while using only a small footprint in public areas with limited space.

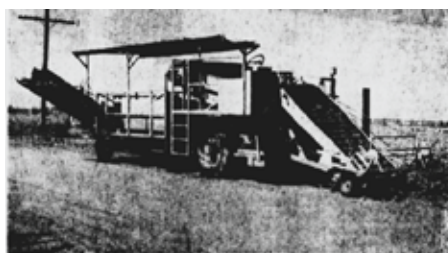
THAT YOU... DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT

Benner-Nawman's 100 years have seen the company evolve from an ambitious, if humble, beginning in an Oakland metal shop, to become a global manufacturer in the telecommunications industry. Today, B-N companies are known as suppliers of quality contractor equipment. Still, a century is a long time... Here are just a few of the "other" products and fun facts from Benner-Nawman's first 100 years!

The BN Floor Furnace

Among B-N's most profitable products of the 1950s, this multi-stage oil-burning floor furnace was very popular in moderate climates. The BN Floor Furnace required only a 28-inch recess in flooring, and distributed warm air through a surface grate on the floor. The BN floor furnace was often advertised with low financing - making it a low-cost, high-efficiency home heating solution!

The BN 250 model is advertised in the Tampa Tribune, in 1951



THIS TOMATO HARVESTER ADJUSTS TO YOUR FIELD CONDITIONS YOU HAVE COMPLETE CONTROL WITH BENNER-NAWMAN'S ALL-HYDRAULIC TOMATO HARVESTER

The Modesto Bee - December, 1965

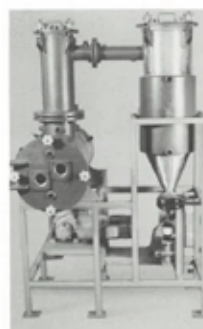
Hydraulic Crop Harvesters

It's easy to take for granted the seemingly endless supply of tomatoes at the local supermarket that you can buy at any time of year, or bags of walnuts, pecans or almonds. Still, somebody had to pick the crops! By the early 1960s, new B-N made machinery was put to use in California's central valleys to increase harvest productivity.

Metal Fabrication Specialities

Pharmaceutical production equipment? Fuel tanks, bread baskets, and conveyor systems? They are all part of Benner-Nawman's rich history, among many products, too numerous to mention! The image to the right is an excerpt from a 1960s-era brochure, highlighting B-N's custom metal design and fabrication services:

Next time a metal fabricating problem comes up... you hit a production snag, need a special design in a hurry, want a part produced in large quantity... give us a call. Metal fabricating problems have been our specialty since 1922 and chances are we've worked on one similar to yours. Here are a variety of recent Benner-Nawman fabricating jobs...



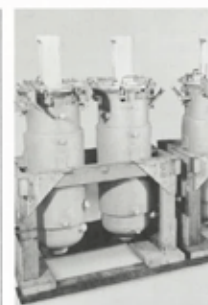
PHARMACEUTICAL PROCESS EQUIPMENT



PHOTO LAB BENCH



GLOVE BOXES



PHARMACEUTICAL AGITATING VESSELS



600 LITER STAINLESS STEEL TANK

HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT: B-N IN POP CULTURE

Benner-Nawman's products have been trendy, too! The BN800 Vanguard payphone shelter's futuristic design was used extensively in television and movie production. You'll see the Vanguard in movie scenes such as "The Phone Booth Game" (Dirty Harry, 1971), or as a recurring "prop" in notable TV series. The iconic payphone has been featured on record covers, and retro-art products.

In 1971 the NFL's Dallas Cowboys opened Texas Stadium, which installed the Vanguard throughout the stadium as public payphones, with a "star" logo added to resemble the team football helmet.

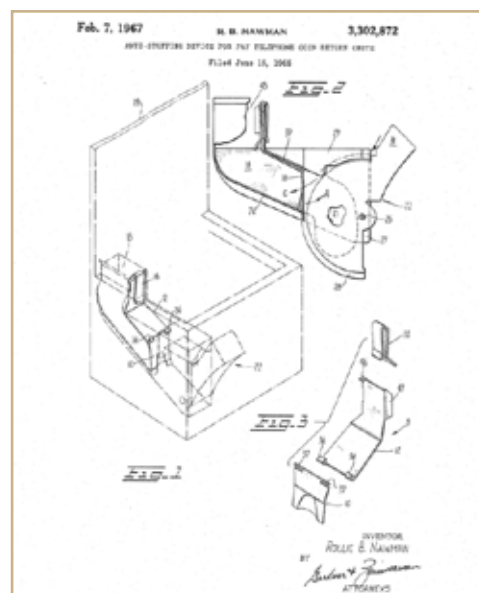
Traditional phone booths have also made their mark in entertainment. A B-N booth became a time machine in Bill & Ted's Excellent Adventure (1989), and other B-N booths have been the subjects of memorable movie scenes!



OPERATION UNPLUGGED COIN THIEVES OUT OF BUSINESS

A trendy crime in the 1960s involved different methods of plugging coin return chutes in public pay telephones, and then returning at a later time to remove the plug, and watch coins fall into a sack like a slot-machine payoff.

Benner-Nawman was granted a 1967 US patent for an anti-theft device that used a hinged, one-way gate, that ensured that a coin return on pay telephones and other vending devices could not be blocked from an external plug. This Rollie Nawman-invention was said to have saved payphone and vending companies many thousands of dollars annually, in lost revenue.



BN