in just under 25 years, CONCOA (Controls Corporation of America) has grown to become an industry leader, partnering with distributors to provide the marketplace with precision gas control solutions.

As an independent ISO 9001-registered company, CONCOA prides itself in manufacturing a complete line of gas pressure equipment, flow control apparatus and delivery systems for worldwide medical, industrial and specialty gas applications. Further still, the company provides distribution equipment for laser materials processing too.

It's been an incredible journey to prominence for CONCOA; company President Sande Dukas describes the "phenomenal distance we've travelled in 25 years". During that time, CONCOA has progressed beyond geographical boundaries to open its CONCOA Europe office in Utrecht, the Netherlands in 1998 and CONCOA Pacific in Malaysia in 2002, as well as more recently opening its Latin America branch in Peru in 2007.

Ahead of gasworld’s Latin American Industrial Gases Conference 2011 in Rio de Janeiro this June, and aligned with our North American focus this month, we’re privileged to an exclusive interview with Dukas as he talks openly about the company’s swift elevation.

Dukas describes the equipment market in North America, CONCOA’s last approaching 25th anniversary, a “rather brisk upick” in revenues over the last six months, and a positive way to view the changing dynamics of the distributor network in the US. Pertinently for all those interested in the Latin American market, Dukas also reflects on its experiences in Peru, including the need for a local presence.

GW: Tell us a little about the history of CONCOA

SD: CONCOA was formed in 1987 by three individuals, myself included, who worked for the major gas companies and saw the need for advanced gas control equipment in the marketplace.

We had the opportunity to purchase a small apparatus business that was located in Virginia Beach. At that time, CONCOA was all about developing and introducing new products that were a departure from the cutting and welding industry, which was in the process of shrinking. This started the expansion of our horizons into new arenas. New products have been and now are, nearly 25 years later, the vehicle for the company’s growth.

GW: So, the 25th anniversary is approaching! You must be delighted with this milestone – do you plan to celebrate this?

SD: Official celebrations will be held at our Virginia Beach headquarters throughout 2012, involving people from industry and government.

We plan to remember the early days of CONCOA and the phenomenal distance we’ve travelled in 25 years, as well as taking a look at where we are headed in the future.

GW: What industries does CONCOA serve, and how?

SD: We are in the business of delivering gas molecules from a container to the point of use. Our products ensure a safe and efficient flow into the end-user’s recipe for use.

Fortunately, there are many applications in which gases are required. Over the years, CONCOA has tailored complete product lines to fit the needs of gas users in these industries, which include medical, metallurgical, petrochemical, electronic, aerospace, power generation, food and beverage, and automotive.

GW: How is the equipment market in North America performing, in CONCOA’s view?

SD: With the assortment of industries we serve, we did not see the kind of recession some others may have experienced. In general, we’ve seen a rather brisk upick in revenues over the last six months.

The momentum derives from diverse sectors across the board. In the energy market, for instance, it comes from the emphasis on developing new sources, or from petrochemicals and other segments. Concurrently, companies are seeking improvements in oil production, another key application in which our equipment is utilised.

Electronics manufacturers are busy developing new and improved devices. Classic chip manufacturers are now turning their attention to manufacturing solar cells and LED’s. Additionally, I believe that we’ve finally seen the effects of stimulus money in the classic industrial markets. This is on top of the continued growth in medical applications. The increase in the needs and uses of gases has precipitated an ideal situation as customers call on us to develop new gas controls.

GW: How do you see the market developing in North America?

SD: Fortunately, R&D involving gas applications is spearheaded in North America. We expect that trend to continue, giving us the opportunity to serve more new markets with new products as those new users approach CONCOA to provide the appropriate gas controls.

GW: As a company that partners with a host of distributors, how does CONCOA see the US distributor market evolving?

SD: Consolidation is not a phenomenon unique to the gas business. It is a trend in every industry. What’s important to manufacturers is to have an efficient number of points of distribution.

When consolidation leads to reduction, it provides opportunities for new businesses to spring up, which we expect to happen over the next few years. In most industries we service, distributors are the route to the marketplace. For CONCOA, the distributor channel is very important. Unlike some of our competitors, we believe that distributors add important value to our product for the vast majority of end-user applications.

GW: CONCOA has operations in Malaysia (since 2002) and South America through its office in Peru (since 2007). How have you found business in these regions? What can you tell us about the Latin America market?

SD: We are thrilled with the investment we made in Kuala Lumpur. Though we started out with a small amount of business there, our growth has been steady and rapid over the last decade. The result of our capturing market share and explosive growth in the region.

Our customers appreciate the fact that we are able to service them on a more local basis. Our position in Europe, for which we opened a facility in the Netherlands prior to Malaysia, is similar to that of Malaysia.

We opened in Peru about five years ago, and the situation there is a little different. Our
In the final analysis, it made more sense to maintain and grow our business with a local presence in South America...