

# Acrylon Plastics molds its future

What's the direct connection between the White House and Winnipeg-based Acrylon Plastics Inc? Actually, it's a very solid one. The Manitoba firm provided integral moulded components for the Rainbow Play Systems, Inc. playground set installed in March on the south lawn of the famous Washington residence.

The US President's daughters, Malia and Sasha, ages 10 and 7, are reported as delighted with the carefully chosen parental gift including a

picnic table with etched brass plates attached with the names of all 44 presidents. And Dad, when he's not too busy with affairs of state, can view his girls at play from the Oval Office.

It may be long haul from the White House to Winkler, MB, where Acrylon got its start in 1978 and still operates a plant but there are good many reasons why the firm's products earned US presidential approval. In the 31 intervening years since its launch and a subsequent head office move to Winnipeg the ISO-registered company has continued to grow and expand its product line and sales. It still has the original customers and new ones by being able to provide advanced technology, state-of-the-art equipment and comprehensive service.

Acrylon can offer its customers thermoforming technologies and profile extruding to produce both complex geometrical and highly cosmetic parts. Secondary operations to reduce customers' inventory

levels include trimming, drilling, routing, tapping, milling, welding and assembly. In addition, Acrylon has the ability to send and receive electronic models over the Internet to save valuable design time.

The company had an original payroll of 10 employees and workspace of 20,000 square feet. Now 250 people are on board, working out of four different locations in Manitoba and plant in Saskatchewan. In total, these operations occupy 165,000 square feet and are focal points for providing North American markets with high-quality, low-cost plastic products through flexible manufacturing systems that utilize a variety of resins to match customer needs, as well as tougher regulatory requirements in this era of going green.

Leading the company is President Craig McIntosh, a native of Virden, MB, who had previously worked at Acrylon as vice-president and came back to buy the operation in 2005.

Acrylon's primary markets are in North America, with sales split about evenly between Canada and US firms. McIntosh doesn't view offshore competition as a major threat at present to Acrylon's business because export-aimed foreign countries have yet to provide acceptable quality control, shipment guarantees or follow-up service reliability.

As to Canadian firms trying to crack offshore markets, McIntosh gives greatly upgraded marks to the recently expanded support areas offered by such federal agencies as the Business Development Bank of Canada and Export Development Canada. He is a strong



The first family has a Winnipeg connection in the form of a slide.

believer that any Canadian firm entering foreign territory must have current, reliable information on business conditions, practices and competition in the chosen market, with special guidance on the pitfalls one may encounter.

Because of Acrylon's product diversity, (such as window frames for the housing market), it has not suffered the hard knocks dealt in the current recession to some other manufacturing areas particularly the auto parts supply sector.

Nevertheless, as a member of CME MB, McIntosh meets with a peer group once a month to discuss a range of issues affecting the members' business operations on both the technical and marketing side. McIntosh regards this open and frank exchange of viewpoints as extremely beneficial for all participants particularly in these troubled economic times.

As to becoming more efficient by running LEAN, McIntosh says variations of this practice are not new to Acrylon. "Continuously driving for improvement is part of what has made us successful," he says. "We recognized early on that we needed to make the investment in the best equipment

available in order to compete effectively. And we did this, even when the Canadian dollar was at a low point but it has paid off in being able to provide what the customer wants."

"Some of the improvements that we have seen in our plans I wouldn't have believed possible at the beginning of the introduction phase," says McIntosh. "We have three plants which used to have work in progress. Now they don't have any, and there is no need nor provision for storage. A part comes off a machine and 10 minutes later, it's finished goods and ready to ship. Only about five per cent of our business is in Manitoba, so we've had to adapt to compete in

other markets were distance and price are involved against local competition."

This year Acrylon expects its sales to reach between \$35 and \$36 million, triple what they were only six years ago.

Where is Acrylon headed down the road? McIntosh and his management team have already charted a route. "We put a stake in the sand and said how do we get there? What actions do we take every day to move us to that target? What's the company going to look like in five years?" says McIntosh.

"Our aim is to get to a \$100 million in sales in five years," states McIntosh. "We have things in the works now that will get us to \$50 million over the next 12 months and we see more opportunities after that."

"When times are tough, a lot of people think of hunkering down and cutting back on overhead and other expenses," he says. "We have gone the opposite way and invested heavily in our sales department, tripling our sales force in the last 12 months." "People say, shouldn't you be cutting back? And I say, no. If we want to meet our goals we have to have our sales people creating the opportunities."

With that kind of positive philosophy, you have to believe that Acrylon is right on track to reach its target. <sup>20/20</sup>

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