

Hi-Tech Molds Path to Success

By Tammy Daniels - January 09, 2008

PITTSFIELD - Hi-Tech Mold and Tool Inc. more than doubled its space when it moved into a 55,000-square-foot building at 1 Technology Drive back in 1998.

The company's founder and president, William Kristensen Sr., thought that would more more than enough room - at least over the next few decades.

But a year ago, the **company** landed an aerospace contract that's catapulted its growth and pressed it for space. On Monday, Hi-Tech officially opened a new 20,000 square-foot addition - and Kristensen said even more room is needed along with 15 to 20 more trained employees.



William Kristensen Sr.

"I mean the whole thing's gone crazy. We've put in five docks out there and they're all used up already," he said. "When we talk about Phase 3, we're probably talking about another building."

The company's clean room, where it manufactures medical devices, will be expanded from 5,000 square feet to 7,500 and two 400-ton have been purchased. Another eight molding machines have been added over the past few years, along with CNC lathes. Ten workers were hired last year, bringing total employment to 100, and sales are expected to increase 50 percent over the next year.

Its contract with Hamilton Sundstrand to manufacture plastic valves for air-handling systems on the Boeing 787 Dreamliner started at \$11 million and is expected to hit \$200 million this year. In the meantime, its medical valve division has seen 25 percent growth and its consumer division, 20 percent.

The small company is grappling with a mountain of success. Luckily, it has friends to help out.

Tyler Fairbank, president of the Berkshire Economic Development Corp., described the home-grown manufacturer as "the poster child for getting the most out of the economic development network here in the Berkshires."



The 'clean room' at Hi-Tech Mold.

That's because the injection-molding business's leaders have availed themselves of grants, work-force training, low-interest loans and other supports developed by Berkshire County business leaders and the state over the years. The new addition, for example, was made possible by a \$2.5 million MassDevelopment tax-exempt bond administered through TD Banknorth.

It's been honored by the Massachusetts Alliance for Economic Development for having a positive impact on the state through job creation, expansion and community involvement. (Susan Houston, MAED's executive director, re-presented the 2007 award Monday.)

But with the its stratospheric rise, Hi-Tech needs more than just money - it needs some experienced advice. Enter Williams Hines Sr., recently retired chief executive officer of Interprint Inc.

Hines will get a seat on Hi-Tech's newly formed board of directors and Hines Site Group, a consulting and investment group established in 2004, will offer strategic planning, organizational development, public relations and personnel recruitment, and manufacturing process improvements.

"When we started 25 years ago, I never would have expected this company to be where it is today," said Kristensen. "I think we're at a point now ... that it's just gone crazy. We need to get a handle."

Hines' had experience in fast-growing businesses, making the company he started in 1987 (as a subsidiary of Germany's Interprint International Group) the North American market share leader in design and printing for laminate and laminate flooring and moving it into a \$23 million facility only a few years.

"I feel the key to success is the leadership, management and operation skills we can bring," said Hines. "Hi-Tech's new business opportunities and rapid growth need to be carefully planned and well orchestrated and that's where our expertise will be helpful. I'm glad to be on board."

Hi-Tech is also partnering with Berkshire Community College. Bill Mulholland, dean of lifelong learning, said the college will provide work-force development resources for current and prospective employees. He noted that the college's new manufacturing degree allows students at McCann Technical School and Taconic High School's vocational program to earn college credentials.

He referred to a phrase Hines had coined about skilled workers when he was head of the Berkshire Applied Technology Council: "If we can't find them we have to grow our own."

Today's workers "have to be critical thinkers, skilled in math and science, able to communicate effectively, operate highly technical machinery and computers," said Fairbank.

"We need good, trained people. There's some tremendous opportunities here and we just hope people come through the door to help us out," said Kristensen, adding the Hamilton contract runs through 2028, guaranteeing long-term employment with stability.



William Hines Sr., left, Susan Houston, Bill Mulholland, Carleen Matthews, Tyler Fairbank, David Pelligrini and Kristensen.