



# BREAKING THE MOLD!

SEE HOW TWO PA-BASED PLASTICS COMPANIES ARE SUCCEEDING IN THE MARKETPLACE

PHOTO BY TONY ESPOSITO

BY MATT PROSS, STAFF WRITER

**I**n preparation for the Plastics SourceNet Symposium coming up in March, *PA Manufacturer* caught up with two successful Pennsylvania plastics manufacturers to learn their keys to success.

## MCCLARIN ADDS VALUE AND KEEPS IT LEAN

For McClarin Plastics, a contract manufacturer of large thermoplastic and composite components, active growth and increased revenue were byproducts of its customer focus. Through the continuous improvement of its processes and a drive to provide maximum value to its customers, the mid-sized manufacturer significantly expanded its capabilities to provide comprehensive client support.

"We're a thermoplastic and composite molder utilizing thermoforming processes,

fiberglass open molding, resin transfer molding and vacuum infusion," Roger Kipp, Vice President of Engineering and Marketing at McClarin Plastics, explained. "At this point, 87 percent of our business is as a contract manufacturer of large plastic components. Being a contract manufacturer tends to take you towards other responsibilities compressing our customers' supply chain and creating value in every aspect of what we do for them.

"We go beyond being just a molder and add value to all aspects of the manufacturing process," Kipp continued. "From assembly, to design and engineering support, to logistics and packaging, we provide as many services as we possibly can to add value for the customer."

The all-inclusive approach McClarin Plastics employs is powered by Lean princi-

ples. Through continuous workforce development and application of lean methodologies in every aspect of its operation, McClarin is able to maximize its production per square footage, resulting in lower end cost for the customer.

"Over the last 10 to 15 years, our focus as a contract manufacturer of large plastic components has not changed," Kipp said. "The aspect that has changed is our methodology. The application of Lean manufacturing principles has had the biggest impact on being able to sustain growth, maintain quality and increase our productivity per labor hour."

The mid-sized manufacturer is ISO 9001:2000 certified and employs multiple Lean principles, including Six Sigma and Kaizen. McClarin Plastics meticulously trains its employees in the ways of Lean so

**Mike LaRocco (pictured on the opposite page) is leading the growth at U.S. Liner Company. The outfit makes woven and unwoven thermoplastic composites.**

much so that the principles are an inherent trait of the company's culture.

"Our continuous improvement is a result of the lean business methods," Kipp asserted. "These principles make you unique if you practice what you preach...and in our case, they have become a part of the company's culture because there is continuous exposure to training and education.

"Bottom line: we have fun doing what we do. Everyone in this company has the same focus and shares the same culture."

McClarín Plastics currently employs 200 people and uses its 200,000 sq. ft. of manufacturing space in Hanover, Pa., to provide contract manufacturing services to the construction equipment industry, the waste water management industry, the transportation industry and, most recently, the wind energy industry.

#### **BULLET-PROOF PRODUCTS IS THE NAME OF THE GAME**

U.S. Liner Company (USLCO), a manufacturer of woven and non-woven thermoplastic composites drives growth and industry change with its one-of-a-kind advanced materials. The company brought its flagship composite, Bulitex®, to market in 1998 to replace traditional materials used as protective wall liners in refrigerated trailers and railcars.

The composite, a ballistic-grade, reinforced thermoplastic, has also been used as bumper beams and fuel tank shields in the automotive industry, which replaced traditional steel beams and covers. Up to six times stronger than traditional lining materials, Bulitex is available in thicknesses from .040" to .200" and is capable of stopping a .45 caliber bullet fired from 20 feet.

"Bulitex allowed USLCO the ability to illustrate to various markets that just as their current materials have gone through a transformation and evolution, so does advanced materials like Bulitex," said Mike LaRocco, President and Chief Executive Officer of U.S. Liner Company.

In support of LaRocco's assertion, the massive lamination machines housed at the company's Cranberry Twp., Pa., headquarters are one-of-a-kind and were developed specifically to manufacture Bulitex.

Continuous layers of glass-reinforced thermoplastic fibers are woven together and then heated, compressed and cooled to form a virtually impenetrable rigid sheet. U.S. Liner Co. is capable of producing Bulitex at a rate of 100,000 sq. ft. a day through this revolutionary process.

However, like its ballistic-grade cousin, KEVLAR®, Bulitex has a higher cost than traditional materials.

In response, U.S. Liner Co. recently developed its next generation of composite technology – Versitex. Like Bulitex, Versitex is a thermoplastic composite that is very strong and lightweight. However, since it is not woven like Bulitex, the manufacturing process is much faster and subsequently much cheaper. Now, unlike Bulitex, Versitex is priced competitively with traditional materials such as fiberglass and plywood.

The ability to offer advanced composite technology at a competitive price is a huge advantage for the mid-sized manufacturer, which recently entered the recreational vehicle market (RV) with its Versitex product.

"We currently have programs in place that will begin to utilize Versitex instead of plywood in the recreation vehicle market,

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which demands 650 million sq. ft. of wood annually,” explained LaRocco.

“Versitex is lighter, much stronger, and has antimicrobial properties if required for the application.”

“With the advent of our new Versitex development, we have commitments and forthcoming contracts in which we should reach revenues of close to \$75 million in the next 30 months just in the RV market alone,” LaRocco asserted.

In April 2007, USLCO announced a deal with TekModo LLC, an Indiana-based materials supplier, to supply the RV market with Versitex to replace traditional wood substrates currently in use in recreational vehicles. **P**