

Fabri-Form debuting PE spacers for trucks

By Dan Hockensmith

PLASTICS NEWS STAFF

NEW CONCORD, OHIO — On the icy morning of Feb. 19, five deer — two does and three fawns — darted from a nearby tree line to forage on wind-swept stubble of snow-dusted grass outside Fabri-Form Co.'s corporate headquarters in New Concord.

"There's a buck in the trees," Chief Executive Officer John Knight said. "He'll come out later in the day."

Watching deer and the occasional flock of wild turkeys are part of the job perks for employees of the thermoforming and custom fabricating company founded by Knight's father, Jack, on Oct. 9, 1943, in nearby Byesville, Ohio.

What began as a small shop making acrylic aircraft nose cones and canopies has grown into a company with fiscal 2007 sales of \$50 million and 250 employees at plants in Byesville, and in Bluffton and Pekin, Ind. Fabri-Form ranks 31st among North American thermoformers in *Plastics News*' 2008 annual survey.

The company's newest product is a truck bulkhead spacer, marketed in 2006, that's designed to space the weight of loads in semitrailers toward the back of the rigs and to absorb up to 20,000 pounds of forward force during hard stops.

Made of polyethylene with molded-in handles, each spacer consists of a six-cavity unit that can be interlocked with another spacer, and set for specific loads in 16-inch increments.

The spacer weighs 26 pounds. An optional PE separator pad, designed to go between the spacer and a truck's load, weighs 18 pounds.

"It allows for more density of the truck and allows for faster loading of

Fabri-Form Co. photo



Fabri-Form's polyethylene truck bulkhead spacers are designed to space the weight of loads in semitrailers toward the back of the rigs and to absorb up to 20,000 pounds of forward force.

North America LLC of Portland, Ore. (formerly Freightliner LLC), and Pac-car Inc. of Bellevue, Wash., owner of the legendary Kenworth and Peter-

the truck," Knight said.

The system's life span is about 10 years; afterward, Fabri-Form will buy the components back and grind them into flake. "It supports sustainable companies and our company as well," he said.

Anheuser-Busch Cos. Inc. was the first customer for the truck bulkhead spacer and Fabri-Form actively is seeking new customers. In a Feb. 22 e-mail, Anheuser-Busch spokesman Pier Scott said the system is used on all trucks and rail cars that transport the company's products.

"Our more than 600 wholesalers across the country have responded very favorably to this product, which has helped decrease shipping damage by two-thirds since we began using it," Scott said.

Fabri-Form is no stranger to the packaging or the trucking industries — they are its primary end markets.

The company makes sleeper bunk beds and storage units, as well as various covers, guards and shields, for customers including Daimler Trucks

built brands.

Last year Freightliner named Fabri-Form one of its Masters of Quality, an award given to fewer than 50 of its nearly 3,000 suppliers.

Fabri-Form's shipping customers include several automotive manufacturers, overseas electronics companies and food suppliers.

Knight pointed out a banana shipping tray Fabri-Form's engineers developed for a client shipping fruit from South America to Europe. It has a laminated surface and drain holes, as well as overlapping edges so trays won't slip and crush bananas in transit.

"In the past, they were using boxes," he said. "This beats the heck out of that system."

Fabri-Form also makes a line of school storage trays, as well as dog beds and other consumer products.

Fabri-Form branches out

After its initial success making military aircraft parts during World War

II, Fabri-Form branched out in the 1950s to molding door liners for refrigerators. During the 1960s, the company made pilot/astronaut face shields for the U.S. military and NASA.

Following her husband's death in 1962, Shirley Knight advanced from Fabri-Form secretary to president and treasurer, a post she held until turning the family firm over to her son in 1980. Shirley Knight remained involved with the company until her death at age 90 in 1998.

Fabri-Form broke ground on its \$2.5 million corporate campus in 1997. The complex brought the company's administrative, sale, engineering and tooling and test labs under one roof.

Photos of Jack and Shirley Knight and some of their employees line the hallways connecting various parts of the 42,000-square-foot complex. Plaques with the names of some longtime employees — including Dominic



Master builder Louis Wharton, a 37-year Fabri-Form employee, refinishes a mold block at the New Concord, Ohio, tool shop.

Plastics News photo by Dan Hockensmith

Frazzoni, who worked for the company from 1946-2000 — are prominent outside the administrative wing.

“We have a big history to protect here,” John Knight said. “It’s all about who we were, who we are and what we can grow to be.”

Whisking a mound of sawdust off a huge wooden mold block he was refinishing in the company's tooling shop, master builder Louis Wharton,

a 37-year Fabri-Form employee, said he was proud to be part of the operation.

“I’m not even thinking about [retirement] yet,” he said. “I just enjoy coming to work every day.”

Fabri-Form's growth hasn't stopped.

“When we start a new operation, we try to do that in such a way that it doesn't detract from our core business,” Knight said.

In 2004, Fabri-Form bought the equipment assets of another longtime thermoformer, Hopple Plastics Inc., from Waddington North America and moved them to Byesville.

When he's not running Fabri-Form, Knight serves on various community boards. He is past president and senior member of the Society of Plastics Engineers. In the Society of the Plastics Industry he is a board member of the society's Thermoforming Institute. Knight also is a member of the Institute of Packaging Professionals.



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