

Prince Rubber Looks to Electrical Markets

By Jane Schmitt | BUSINESS FIRST November 19, 2004

At the Buffalo-based Prince Rubber & Plastics Co. Inc., it's all about Project 21, an internal program committed to excellence in service, workmanship and quality.

That commitment is expected to bring continued success for the custom manufacturer, fabricator and supplier of elastomeric and plastic products, which had sales of more than \$7 million last year.

"We have tried to specialize in both product and industry - the major concentration in the electrochemical industry, manufacturing cell parts from specially developed rubber and plastic compounds of our own," says S. Warren Prince Jr., CEO. "This has allowed us, even though we are a small company, to sell internationally and enjoy a niche-type business."

Prince Rubber & Plastics, which also has facilities in Louisiana and Canada, has deep roots locally. It was started in 1931 by Prince's father, Sidney, as a supplier of rubber and plastics to the automotive, steel and emerging electrolytic chemical industries. During World War II, it handled rubber assemblies for Bell Aircraft, Curtis-Wright Co. and other companies involved in the war effort.

The company later branched into the heavy chemical industry in the Niagara Falls area. Prince says that was due to cheap power and sources of salt, which was used to make brine for the heavy chemicals.

These days, 20 percent of company sales come from exports to customers in South and Central America, Western Europe, the Persian Gulf and the Pacific Rim, he says. Total employment is 54."

"In the heavy chemical industry, we produce the parts which are used in the electrolytic cells for the production of chlorine, caustic, hydrogen and chlorate," Prince says. "In the pulp and paper industry, we produce the gaskets and process piping for the bleaching process in paper mills."

The company also supplies specialty rubber and plastic components for such manufacturers as Eastman Kodak Co., Xerox Corp., Eastman Machine Co., Gaymar Industries Inc. and Columbus McKinnon Corp.

"We are a third-generation company," Prince said. Daughter Jennifer is marketing vice president and another daughter, Allison, sits on the board of directors. Company president is Thomas Hanshar, who joined Prince 18 years ago.

"We are developing with a European partner a type of precious metal foam contact material for electrical connections, which is proving to show tremendous savings in electrical costs due to the reduction in power loss or voltage drop," Prince said. "We hope to develop use for this product in heavy electrical consumption markets, such as producers of aluminum, nickel and the electrochemical industry."



S. Warren Prince Jr., left, Jennifer Prince Bronstein and Thomas Hanshar represent the second and third generation of Prince Rubber. Photo: Jim Courtney / Business First