

FOCUS

BUSINESS BERKS

Hamburg concern specializes in casting aluminum

By **TERRY SCOTT REED**
Business Journal Correspondent

Even a specialized company with qualifying parameters that exclude many potential clients can be diversified.

Trega Corp. of Hamburg specializes in permanent metal molded aluminum. There are several ways to cast aluminum, and President Bradley O. Gammons said that the needs of some customers may be too large or too small. An ideal client for Trega, according to Gammons, would need parts that weigh from 2 ounces to 20 pounds, and are less than 30 inches by 30 inches.

Quantities range from about 100, up to thousands, he said.

“We have a local focus, as much as we can. We buy locally, and do everything we can to provide local jobs.”

*Bradley O. Gammons
Trega Corp. Hamburg*



Bradley O. Gammons, president of Trega Corp., Hamburg, points out a detail on a rough casting of the company's proprietary water well caps. Photo by Terry Scott Reed

Other options for customers would be traditional sand casting, or, at the opposite end, high-volume injection molding. Besides size and quantity, each casting method has other advantages and disadvantages, depending on the customer's need and the design of the part.

Gammons said that permanent molded parts tend to be stronger because of the grain structure, due to the way the part is cooled. They also have a better finish than a sand-cast part.

While higher volume die casting might be cheaper per piece, Gammons said the cost of those types of molds may be four to five times higher than gravity molds.

Trega has a number of CNC machines that, along with some hand finishing, enable the company to ship products that are ready for use. The company recycles and remelts the excess that is cut away, Gammons said.

Today, the company produces a combina-

tion of proprietary products and customer work. The company grossed \$1.7 million in revenue in 2008. About 10 percent of that comes from a variety of well-head caps Trega sells to the construction and plumbing supply industries.

The balance of the company's revenue comes from customer job-shop work.

Housing market

Gammons said the well-head caps are tied closely to construction, so, between the winter off-season and the current housing market, that revenue stream is not very active right now.

Gammons said that among the first items the company produced were bases for traffic light poles for the city of Philadelphia.

Another mainstay has been seating components for fast-food restaurants.

“Because some of what we do is related to construction and also the outdoor furniture sector, we experience a seasonal peak during April through October,” Gammons said.

Gammons said the company has avoided selling to automakers, just because “there are companies all around Detroit that do, and they specialize in working for the car companies. They have a shipping-cost advantage on us, and we have found plenty of other work, so we have never sought that business. We do some work for some after-market-parts providers, though.”

The company uses three commissioned sales reps, and covers a footprint that stretches from Maine to the Carolinas, and extends west to Ohio and Indiana. “We have a local focus, as much as we can. We buy locally, and do everything we can to provide local jobs,” Gammons said.

Aluminum is a very green business, because, as Gammons said, “98 percent of all aluminum in use is recycled aluminum.” But the company has found that green equals green of another kind, in the form of operational savings that reflect favorably on the company bottom line.

Among initiatives the company has implemented are a four-day/10-hour work week for many departments, most notably the casting department.

Aluminum is cast at about 1,300 degrees, according to Gammons, so the company can save utility costs by being able to hold the raw molten aluminum at lower temperatures for a longer period of time.

“We can cast it faster than we can finish it, so it works out nicely,” he said.

Operating costs

But the company has saved operating costs in other areas besides the casting department. “By recycling, and also reducing our use of cardboard, paper, and aluminum cans, we now use a trash container that is half the size of the former one, and that saves us money there, too,” he said.

Gammons said that the firm is also very conscious of unneeded lighting. Because of the heat generated by the melting furnaces, the heaters in the foundry never run.

PROFILE

Operation spans 3 generations

Although Trega Corp., Hamburg, was founded in 1973, its president, Bradley O. Gammons, traces his family's involvement back three generations, to the agricultural business that his grandfather, Albert Trexler, started by improving another company's troublesome machinery.

“It began when my grandfather, a farmer, became curious about an automated potato seed cutter he heard a neighbor had acquired. At the time, potatoes were a very common crop around this area. When he went to look at it, the neighbor told him the machine was useless and didn't work well. Looking it over, my grandfather told the man he thought he might be able to make it work better, and would he mind loaning it to him to see what he could do?” Gammons said.

“You can just have it. I don't want it,” the man told him. So, he took it, and he did make it work. Eventually, that led to his buying the machines new from the manufacturer, and modifying them for resale. When he heard the company was going out of business, he bought all of their parts and went into the business of making them entirely,” Gammons said.

“Henry Ford was impressed with what my grandfather had done, and saw great poten-

tial for the devices, as modified by my grandfather. He told him he should mass produce them, that there would be a good demand, but my grandfather never cared much for dealing with people, and wanted to minimize that,” Gammons said. “He wanted to sell as many as he could to make a decent living, and no more.”

Manufacturing the potato seed devices led Trexler into the business of permanent mold casting of aluminum. Bradley's father, David Gammons, became involved after working as a designer.

As Bradley related the tale, his father had a sports car and wanted fancier wheels for it, so he designed his own and cast them at the foundry of his father-in-law, Albert Trexler. He discovered that he liked the process, and subsequently took over the business, forming Trega, which is a combination of the Trexler and Gammons names.

Bradley Gammons worked summers and after school in the factory, but he said he wasn't really sure just what he would do for a career — he has a degree in economics and business as well as an advanced degree in safety.

“I knew I'd probably be self-employed one day, but I really didn't consider Trega until my father suggested I take it over from him.”



Business basics

TREGA CORP.

- **Principal:** Bradley O. Gammons, president
- **Address:** 625 Valley Road, Hamburg, PA 19526
- **Telephone:** 1 (800) 356-3254, (610) 562-5558
- **Fax:** (610) 562-5990
- **Web site:** www.tregacorp.com
- **E-mail:** sales@tregacorp.com
- **Number of employees:** 10-15 full-time, seasonally adjusted
- **Locations:** 1
- **Years operating:** 36

Gammons said the company did experience a very slight downturn in sales between 2007 and 2008. But he sees stability and strength in the company's diversified client base and the variety of items it produces.

The lack of automotive-dependent customers is also a strength. In deference to the economic downturn, Gammons said he has increased the company's marketing budget, and is in the process of having the company Web site redesigned. New market-related literature is also in the works, he said.

If you would like to have yourself or your business considered for the Profile tell us what makes you or your business unique, what you have done to create a niche in your particular industry or what you have done that has made a difference. Send information to John L. Moore, Editor, EPBJ, 65 E. Elizabeth Ave., Suite 700, Bethlehem, PA 18018. You also can send an e-mail to john.m@epbj.com.