

# Homegrown success

## Waupaca County businesses grow locally



Centerline Machine broke ground in April on a \$2 million project in Waupaca's Business and Technology Park. The custom machining and fabrication company saw sales grow six-fold between 2008 and 2009.

ILLUSTRATION COURTESY CENTERLINE MACHINE

Things got so busy for Centerline Machine of Waupaca last summer the company's planned expansion got put on the back burner. That turned out to be a good thing – the original plan wouldn't have been large enough to handle the company's recent growth.

Centerline Machine, a custom machining and fabrication company, recently broke ground on a \$2 million project in Waupaca's Business and Technology Park. The 43,500-square-foot building includes 12,000 square feet for future growth. The additional space will likely be needed since the sales grew six times between 2008 and 2009.

"We're part of the supply chain for Oshkosh Corp. and its military vehicles and that has just taken off for us, while

at the same time, we're finding new customers and expanding into new areas," says president Charles Leiby, who started Centerline in his garage in 1996. "The growth has been incredible and we've really come a long way."

Centerline Machine will move into its new facility in mid-September.

In addition to the new facility, Centerline Machine is also investing in new equipment, including 10 new machines in 2009. Those new machines added about 12 jobs, bringing the company's total workforce up to 42 employees. Once the new facility opens, there's a potential to add another 15 employees.

Centerline is just one of several Waupaca area businesses in an expansion mode, says Waupaca City Administrator Henry Veleker.

"Centerline is such a huge shot in the arm for us as a community. To have a local manufacturer expand at a time when the economy is not so good is just awesome," he says.

Spirit Implements has also grown, signing an exclusive deal to supply McCormick International USA and Landini/McCormick Canada with front end loaders and other tractor attachments. Spirit opened a corporate headquarters and manufacturing facility in 2008, adding more than 30 workers in the past two years.

"We invested a lot in the Waupaca Business and Technology Park on the east side and it's great to see development there. Fox Valley Technical College opened a regional campus more than a year ago and we really see that as impetus for more growth," says Veleker,

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adding that Sunny Day Child Care, a \$1 million, 25,000-square-foot child care center is going in right across the street from the FVTC campus, which will be convenient for parents heading back to school. "We really want to increase the traffic count in that area of the city and continue its growth."

The area's largest employer – ThyssenKrupp Waupaca – is also growing. Last month, the foundry, which has about 1,200 employees locally, announced plans to hire 150 workers. While some of the positions will be new hires, others will be filled by some of the 160 employees who were laid off in early 2009.

In Weyauwega, World Class Manufacturing recently acquired Wiza Industries in Muskego, which was set to close. CEO Bob Peltonen says the company employs 200 people at its facilities in Muskego, Weyauwega, Menasha and Bayfield.

"I can easily see that number being up to 300 by the end of the year. We are seeing a lot of opportunity out there and are continuing growing our customer base," Peltonen says.

World Class manufactures a variety of parts for customers across the country, including Honeywell, Cummings and Oshkosh Corp. The addition of the Muskego facility brings the total CNC machines owned by World Class to 300, which Peltonen says provides the company to rapidly meet customers' needs.

"We run 24 hours a day, seven days a week," he says. "Our customer base is not only growing, it's also diversified, which is essential to keeping us growing."

World Class Manufacturing is

part of the North Star Manufacturing Alliance, a group of northern Wisconsin manufacturers working together to provide a single point of service for multiple products and services. "Our goal all along has been to retain and create good-paying jobs here in Wisconsin, and the Alliance has helped us do that," Peltonen says. "We can compete worldwide on cost and performance."

### INVESTING IN NEW LONDON

Businesses also continue to invest in New London, which straddles the border of Waupaca and Outagamie counties.

EJ Metals, a manufacturer of all-terrain fire trucks, will move into its new corporate headquarters and manufacturing facility by early summer. The project includes 20,000 square feet of manufacturing space, room for offices and a showroom where new fire apparatus will be displayed.

"This new facility expands our production capabilities significantly and increases the ability of our talented team to serve our civilian and military customers throughout the U.S. and around the world," says EJ Metals President Kevin Quinn.

The company is moving from Hortonville and was able to secure funding from the City of New London to help with the project.

Celebrating its 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary, New London Medical Center recently completed a renovation project that included an expansion and remodeling at the adjacent ThedaCare Physicians-New London. The \$10.5 million, 33,312-square-foot project included a surgery center, high-tech imaging

and screening capabilities, a new transitional care facility and expanded room for the clinic's primary care physicians and visiting specialists.

### TOURISM IMPACT

With the Chain of Lakes and Wolf River, Waupaca County and northern Outagamie County remain a popular destination for visitors from the Fox Valley, Milwaukee and Chicago, says Terri Schulz, executive director of the Waupaca Area Chamber of Commerce. "We're definitely an affordable family destination and there are lots of things to do here," she says.

While summer is the busiest season, the other seasons also see traffic as people get their cottages ready in the spring and rush to get out on the lakes, enjoy the fall colors or snowmobile and cross-country ski during the winter, Schulz says.

In 2008 – the last year available – tourists spent about \$108 million throughout Waupaca County, which translates to about 3,300 jobs.

"We were down a bit in 2009 with people doing shorter vacations, but we're praying for lots of sun and warm weather, which will help our numbers rise in 2010," she says. ①

### CLOSER LOOK

#### Waupaca/Western Outagamie Counties

Here are the economic resources for Waupaca County as well as western and northern Outagamie County:

» **City of Waupaca:** [www.waupacaedge.com](http://www.waupacaedge.com)  
**Henry Veleker:** (715) 258-4411

» **Waupaca County Economic Development Corp:** [www.wcedc.org](http://www.wcedc.org)  
**David Thiel:** (920) 982-1582

» **Greater Outagamie County Economic Development Corp:** [www.gocedc.org](http://www.gocedc.org)  
**Michael Hendrick:** (920) 832-5255