

PBN PROVIDENCE BUSINESS NEWS

MANUFACTURING



2021 AWARDS

STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP
AWARD WINNER
STUART BENTON

*Bradford Soap CEO
empowers employees*
Page 4

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Gallo|Thomas is proud to sponsor the 2021 Manufacturing Awards. We congratulate the outstanding group of 2021 honorees and salute your unique attributes and business acumen.

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Congratulations to the winners of the 2021 Manufacturing Awards! In uncertain times, your commitment to excellence was constant. **Polaris MEP** salutes this year's Honorees for your leadership and creativity.

As a partner to Rhode Island's manufacturing community, we are proud of all who pivoted, partnered and persevered throughout an extraordinary year. It is a privilege to support your growth and journey to success.

FROM THE EDITOR

Making the commonplace extraordinary



IN THE RIGHT HANDS and circumstances, the commonplace can become extraordinary. Like soap during a pandemic. "The impact a bar of soap can have on a life is significant," said Stuart Benton, Bradford Soap Works Inc.'s CEO and president. Indeed, handwashing, with soap, was quickly identified by national health leaders early in 2020 as one of the best ways to limit the spread of COVID-19.

That thrust the 350-employee company and its leader into crucial support roles in the global response.

Neither disappointed. Benton, this year's manufacturing awards winner for strategic leadership, says his biggest challenge was implementing an effective safety plan, to ensure the West Warwick facility continued operating and workers stayed safe.

He succeeded. And the company, also being recognized for excellence in green manufacturing, remained an industry leader, donating 547 tons of scrap soap to the global response to the pandemic and more than 100,000 bars locally.

But Benton and his company were not alone in helping ubiquitous products rise to the moment during a global crisis.

Take signs, for example. National Marker Co. has been making safety signs and products since 1934. During the pandemic, demand skyrocketed. The North Smithfield company, this year's winner for overall excellence at a midsize manufacturer, created 4,500 new products last year in response.

How about lights? Warwick-based Lumetta Inc.'s creative lighting designs are everywhere, including hotels, offices and colleges. But few people know who made them or how.

This year's winner for overall excellence at a small manufacturer took a patented material designed for shades and created suspended dividers to help keep people from spreading germs.

And there are other examples in this special section of the commonplace standing out amid a crisis, under the direction of our state's talented manufacturers. We salute them all and the rest of this year's winners.

We'd also like to thank our returning sponsors, including partners Amgen, Cox Business, Gallo|Thomas Insurance Agency Inc. and Polaris MEP.

Michael Mello

Michael Mello
Editor
Providence Business News

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STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP

STUART BENTON, CEO AND PRESIDENT, BRADFORD SOAP WORKS INC.



CEO's small-change approach has big impact at Bradford Soap

BY JOHN A. LAHTINEN | Contributing Writer

A BAR OF SOAP has taken on a whole new importance during the COVID-19 pandemic.

“The impact a bar of soap can have on a life is significant,” said Stuart Benton, Bradford Soap Works Inc.’s CEO and president since 2016. “This impact has never been more apparent than during this year of COVID. We have kept our team safe and working, we have made a product that is key in keeping the virus in check, and we have made donations in R.I. and throughout the world that have reduced sickness, enabled people to earn a living and instilled hope.”

After determining how the coronavirus crisis could affect the West Warwick-based company, its customers and the state, Benton said the decision was made early on to go all in on safety.

“The biggest challenge ... is keeping the people and the facility – the Bradford community – safe and healthy,” said Benton, who was recently named a finalist as a Leader of Change-Pandemic Response by INNOCOS, a cosmetics industry group. “We implemented multiple changes and policy decisions, but in particular physical distancing, changing production speeds, spacing, barriers and added additional cleaning.”

Benton knows directing and guiding the Bradford team is his responsibility and a big part of moving the company forward. To that end, he strives to empower everyone to be leaders, regardless of title.

“I try to get everyone to focus on incremental improvement each and every day,” Benton

said. “It is challenging to make a big-step improvement, but if you can make small, in some instances minute, changes each day, by the time you realize it, the change is significant and measurable. We can learn from everyone and everyone can make a change.”

Bradford has been busy over the past two years, with Benton leading the charge.

First, the company took an underutilized space in its facility and turned it into a state-of-the-art production area for Johnson & Johnson-Neutrogena.

“The company was closing a manufacturing facility in California that was part of a recently purchased brand,” Benton said. “We already manufactured part of the line, but there was a significant piece of production that is not a typical production process; it is more of what is called a hot-poured process. The company turned to Bradford, and over 12 months we were able to convert the space into manufacturing, staff up and start production.”

Bradford also worked with Unilever in developing products for its Love Beauty & Planet brand, which included a bar soap, bath fizz and shampoo bar. Additionally, Bradford developed a first-of-its-kind recyclable paper wrap for Tom’s of Maine.

Reflective of the momentum Bradford has experienced is the fact that it has added nearly 150 employees to its team in the past three years under Benton’s leadership.

Melissa Travis, CEO and president of the Rhode Island Society of Certified Public Accountants, has known Benton, who serves on the RISCOPA board, for years and says the Ocean State is lucky to have him.

“I don’t use the word visionary often, but Stu really is the quintessential visionary,” she said. “I am fairly certain that most Rhode Islanders are not aware that a company in their own backyard has had such an impact on our local economy and our community.”

Travis called Benton the “epitome of a strategic leader,” whose leadership extends beyond manufacturing to Bradford’s supply chain and commitment to sustainable sourcing.

“In 2012, when Bradford had no reliable source of sustainable palm oil in the U.S., Stu took the initiative to work directly with the Rainforest Alliance to have one certified,” Travis said. “He moved Bradford towards zero waste by donating all soap scraps to worldwide health and hygiene initiatives through World Vision and Eco-Soap Bank. You won’t find a leadership book that teaches any of this – it’s embedded in Stu’s DNA.” ■



BRADFORD

‘[Stu] moved Bradford towards zero waste by **donating all soap scraps** to worldwide health and hygiene initiatives.’

MELISSA TRAVIS, Rhode Island Society of Certified Public Accountants CEO and president



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year's winners.***



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OVERALL EXCELLENCE AT AN ENTERPRISE MANUFACTURER | AMGEN RHODE ISLAND



CLOSE EYE: From left, associate manufacturer Adeline Lamothe, manufacturing process technician contract worker Austin White and associate manufacturer David Folco check the single-use bioreactors, which are used to control the conditions for generating protein cells at Amgen Rhode Island in West Greenwich. COURTESY AMGEN INC.

Team approach allows Amgen to complete new plant

BY NANCY KIRSCH | Contributing Writer

AMGEN INC. develops medications for oncology/hematology, cardiovascular disease, inflammation, bone health, nephrology and neuroscience conditions for which treatment options are often limited.

The company has invested more than \$1.5 billion in its 75-acre **Amgen Rhode Island** complex in West Greenwich, including just over \$200 million in its next-generation biomanufacturing plant. The company, which did not disclose Amgen Rhode Island financials, reported \$23.4 billion in total revenue, \$22.1 billion in sales and \$4.1 billion in research and development investments for Amgen worldwide in 2019.

The West Greenwich plant was completed in 2020 and houses one of the world's largest mammalian protein manufacturing facilities. Rhode Island Site Vice President of Operations Brian Britson said West Greenwich was chosen as the location because Amgen Rhode Island has a "proven track record for innovation and operational excellence, a robust infrastructure due to strategic investments, a highly talented staff and robust recruiting base, and strong partnerships with the state of Rhode Island and many local educational institutions."

Amgen, whose corporate headquarters is in Thousand Oaks, Calif., hopes to begin producing drugs in the new plant for human consumption by early 2022, assuming it receives full licensure and approvals from the Food and Drug Administration. In the interim, engineering runs are underway to ensure strict quality control.

"One year into COVID, we've learned to adjust as we go. [With COVID-19], there are not a lot of [options for] long-term planning," said

Plant Manager Peter Rodriguez.

During the pandemic, Amgen Rhode Island welcomed 107 new employees, representing a 13% increase in the number of workers over 2019, and achieved process efficiencies that led to 13,000 hours of found time. With some employees working remotely, others working on-site and still others splitting their work locales, the company saw a 50% reduction in staff injuries, a 20% reduction in contractor injuries and had no cases of on-site COVID-19 transmission. The company also created an on-site training center where employees can practice using materials, equipment and instruments used in production.

Amgen Rhode Island has a strong focus on workforce development, in which 50% of its 903 employees have tenure of 15 years or more. Committed to recruit, hire and retain a diverse talent pool, the company has developed partnerships with local high schools and higher education institutions to ensure appropriate certificates or degree programs and provide co-op and internship opportunities for prospective employees.

New hires receive orientation and an introduction to biopharmaceutical manufacturing training at the University of Rhode Island. They also participate in a two-week Foundational Skills for Manufacturing training program. Job rotation programs, tuition reimbursement, lean manufacturing and Sigma-Six training, mentorship and coaching are also

offered to a wide array of employees.

"Innovation is part of our DNA," Britson said, so the facility employed technology to effectively implement pandemic-driven changes.

Relocating from Singapore with his family to lead Amgen Rhode Island during the pandemic, Britson has yet to meet most of his senior leadership team in person. While the company anticipated bringing in subject matter experts to help support the startup of the new biomanufacturing plant, the pandemic required a new approach. "We leveraged technology to collaborate with experts [from Singapore, the site of Amgen's first such plant]. That really accelerated the new plant's startup success," Britson said.

Through 2021, Amgen Rhode Island is continuing its COVID-19 accommodations, which include routine testing, mandatory masking and contact tracing systems for on-site employees, contractors and visitors to virtually assessing ergonomic conditions, providing free ergonomic equipment and scheduling free time to encourage exercise and breaks for employees working remotely.

Amgen Rhode Island has kept communication lines open. By incorporating other Amgen sites' COVID-19-related knowledge, holding frequent virtual meetings with teams that include significant time for questions, answers and feedback, Britson said the company makes course corrections as needed and focuses on maintaining a safe environment and addressing employees' well-being.

Amgen Rhode Island, Rodriguez said, "is value-centered, with a strong mission to serve patients with staff and teams that work cross-functionally together as one team." ■



'We **leveraged technology** to collaborate with experts. That really accelerated the new plant's startup success.'

BRIAN BRITSON, Amgen Rhode Island site vice president of operations



**Congratulations to all the honorees of
the 2021 PBN Manufacturing Awards.**

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OVERALL EXCELLENCE AT A MIDSIZE MANUFACTURER | NATIONAL MARKER CO.

SIGNS OF THE TIMES: National Marker Co., creator of safety identification signs and products, increased its sales by more than 25% in 2020, as its products were in high demand during the COVID-19 pandemic. At right, manufacturing technician Tim Egan looks over some signs.

PBN PHOTO/RUPERT WHITELEY



Company buy-in allows NMC to adapt on the fly

BY MATTHEW ENRIGHT | Contributing Writer

NATIONAL MARKER CO. has been creating safety identification signs and products since 1934. So when the COVID-19 pandemic hit, the North Smithfield-based company was ready to begin helping others create signs and identification for an unprecedented time.

“We recognized very quickly at the end of February that we had to pivot very quickly in the organization and what the needs were going to be from a communication standpoint,” former CEO Michael Black said.

Black sold the company in December to Deerfield, Ill.-based Justrite Safety Group for an undisclosed amount. The company will continue to operate under the National Marker name.

Director of Operations Andrew Ellison remembers a meeting with Black in the early stages of the pandemic, in which Black said he refused to participate in any recession.

“We called a meeting with the executive leadership group, which included marketing, sales, myself, and we talked about the changes in business that we saw coming, and Michael basically turned to the [vice president] of business development and said, ‘You guys are going to have to do something different,’” Ellison said.

NMC then formed a rapid response team, which created 4,500 new products geared toward the pandemic over the course of the year and launched more than 500 products over two months.

“You go to a grocery store and there [are]

signs on the floor reminding you to socially distance or go one way with the traffic patterns, and NMC led that way,” Ellison said. “We were first to market with a lot of those signage opportunities, and we jumped in front of the market and never looked back.”

In 2020, the company grew more than 25% in sales, which came with its own set of challenges. Nonessential employees worked from home; only the operations team was in the building every day to turn out products. Temperature checks and new protocols were frequent, and wearing masks was enforced.

Ellison credits the employees of NMC for its success.

“From the top to the bottom, it was amazing the response that people had. We walked in the door one day and said, ‘We have to make changes,’ and nobody said, ‘I don’t want to.’ Nobody said, ‘I’m not gonna,’ or ‘That’s not fair,’” Ellison said. Employees volunteered to move to a later night shift, and when production needs required a print center to be run 24 hours a day, employees would work 12-hour shifts. “What they did was they stepped up and said, ‘OK. Tell us where to go, what to do and we’ll

do it.’ And I thought that part was just remarkable ... the amount of buy-in from the group,” Ellison said.

Black also praised the work of NMC’s employees, highlighting that Ellison had needed to adjust quickly after being hired as director of operations in late 2019.

“They were able to pivot, change the floor on multiple occasions. We used to sell maybe 100 banners a year, and then we were selling 200 banners a day, and you had to set the floor up in a different way to flow, and they were able to pivot with that,” Black said. “It was just an exceptional team win.”

Among the changes the production team needed to learn was how to create 4,500 new products on the fly with increased demand. Ellison said NMC was 92% above its normal revenue in June, and at times it was getting orders that were 200 to 300 times the size of an average order.

“We didn’t have time to think. We had time to make product and to shed product,” Ellison said.

With the growth in 2020, Ellison said NMC is working on how to keep its momentum going as the pandemic begins to wind down. The response team still meets twice a day to talk about the market, changes and the projects they’ve been working on.

“Coming out of this, there’s going to be a greater need for products that don’t exist today, as people try to return to work, as people try to get back to normal,” Ellison said. ■



**‘We didn’t have time to think.
We had time to make product and to shed product.’**

ANDREW ELLISON, National Marker Co. director of operations



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and
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Stu Benton, Bradford Soap Works Inc. – Strategic Leadership*

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- ❖ Overall Excellence Small Manufacturer – **Lumetta Inc.**
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- ❖ Green Manufacturing Excellence – **Bradford Soap Works**
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OVERALL EXCELLENCE AT A SMALL MANUFACTURER | LUMETTA INC.



LIGHT TOUCH: Zoila Delacruz, left, and Mirna Delacruz attach Lumetta Inc.'s proprietary antimicrobial and washable Lumenate shade to a frame for a handcrafted, decorative light at the Cranston Public Library. COURTESY LUMETTA INC.

Lumetta adapts light shade material for germ barriers

BY MARY HOWE | Contributing Writer

A PHOTO GALLERY of artful products by **Lumetta Inc.**, a Warwick-based lighting designer and manufacturer, shows a company that clearly prizes creative thinking and innovation.

Lumetta's one-of-a-kind lighting designs, such as wall sconces or hanging "pendant" lights of many geometric shapes and colors, show a delight in the personality of place. Those qualities were clearly utilized during the COVID-19 pandemic to keep the 29-year-old company's 35 to 45 employees adapting and working.

When the health crisis hit the U.S. and quarantine measures began about a year ago, the manufacturing plant in Warwick stayed open and established many of the now-common protocols, said Laura Wistow, Lumetta's marketing manager.

Work hours are staggered; employee health is monitored every day; masks, social distancing and constant handwashing and sanitizing are required; workspaces are well-ventilated; management regularly sends out COVID-19 updates; and any employee who feels ill is required to self-quarantine and visit a doctor.

After securing its workforce, Lumetta realized it had a patented material that could become a tool for public health care. The company's Lumenate is a material designed and used exclusively for lighting shades. It is washable, it can display custom graphics and it has antimicrobial properties. The company is now using the material to create suspended dividers that can be used in almost any setting as a germ barrier between people.

Lumetta is an amalgam of art, science and manufacturing. Bill Prichett, founder and president, is the son of an engineer and an artist, according to the company's website. In college, Prichett studied engineering, mathematics and biology. He became a science teacher while staying involved in art through architectural projects that involved welding, drafting, carpentry and photography. This mixture of interests led to his founding Lumetta in 1992.

Bowen Wheatley, the company's lead product designer, said Lumetta is represented by sales professionals across North America, and it is known for its custom and unique lighting and for service that is attentive and responsive.

The lighting often is single, grouped or stacked structures in square, circular, conical or cylindrical shapes hanging from the ceiling by a single stem or multiple cables. The shades can be printed with text or images. Along with high-end houses, Lumetta lights can be found in hotels, restaurants, colleges, hospitals, offices, banks and retail spaces.

Like any manufacturer, Lumetta must keep up with a constant treadmill of evolving trends in products, Wheatley said. Long ago, lighting was incandescent and florescent, followed by a transition to LED technology. Coming up now, Wheatley said, is "tunable" lighting – a modernized upgrade of the old dimmer switch

– which allows brighter or dimmer light for different settings.

Wheatley said Lumetta worked recently with a performing arts center in New Jersey to develop lighting that allowed the adjustment of different color chips within an LED light.

"We don't want to be playing catch-up," Wheatley said. "We want to be on the leading edge. We want to get better and better at what we do."

Lumetta also has been working with BIOS Lighting to create SkyBlue LED technology. This is designed to mimic the changes in natural sunlight throughout the day. This is beneficial to people who spend much of the day indoors, disconnected from outdoor lighting.

"It complements your biorhythms and helps with mental health and well-being," Wistow said.

The pandemic year brought to Lumetta a fresh and useful collaboration with Sutherland Felt Co., a producer of felt products for industrial uses. In addition to lighting, Lumetta's hanging lights also are made to perform as a sound absorber.

In the past year, Lumetta and Sutherland Felt created a joint marketing venture, part of which was a physical swatch book celebrating both companies' products. Lumetta designed the book and graphics; Sutherland Felt inserted display boards of felt and assembled the books.

"Materials samples are a key part of any new product," Wheatley said. "This ended up being something that benefitted everyone." ■



'We want to be on the leading edge.
We want to get better and better at what we do.'

BOWEN WHEATLEY, Lumetta Inc. lead product designer



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EXCELLENCE IN EXPORTING | AVTECH SOFTWARE INC.

FLEXIBLE TEAM: Richard Grundy, left, president and chief operating officer for AVTECH Software Inc. in Warren, speaks with Jonathan Foltz, fulfillment manager. Grundy said the COVID-19 pandemic allowed AVTECH to reimagine a more agile team structure, which helped it prevent downtime. PBN PHOTO/RUPERT WHITELEY

Room Alert sales outside U.S. keep AVTECH on its toes

BY JENNIFER L. GRYBOWSKI | Contributing Writer

WHILE THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC posed a challenge for most companies in 2020, **AVTECH Software Inc.** was well-prepared for an emergency and has seen business increase over the past year.

“Our focus is about business continuity and resilience, and never has that been more important than in the aftermath of COVID-19,” President and Chief Operating Officer Richard Grundy said. “We were in a unique position to provide the capability to prevent downtime.”

AVTECH is a Warren-based computer hardware and software developer and manufacturer. The company’s Room Alert products proactively monitor critical facilities and assets for conditions such as temperature, humidity, power, leaks, smoke/fire, air flow, room entry, motion, cameras and more. Room Alert is in use in more than 185 countries and can be found in over 80% of Fortune 1000 companies, as well as most state and federal agencies and all branches of the U.S. military.

“We didn’t lose any productivity,” Marketing and Channel Communications Manager Russell Benoit said, referring to AVTECH’s pandemic response. “We knew we could work from home; we knew we’d be able to keep going. A lot of our customers weren’t able to do that.”

Grundy said AVTECH heard from customers who left their offices, leaving no one to monitor the buildings. If something went wrong, it would slow down or stop business.

“Historically, customers may have looked

at our products as nice-to-haves,” Grundy said. “We had the same challenges with no one being in our building, so we started to use our own products to prove ourselves and give a greater visibility to conditions that could cause our business to be negatively impacted.”

AVTECH decided to provide the highest level of product access to its customers free for six months, which included the ability to get advanced alert customized messages and collaborate with team members. The company also published a business continuity checklist so customers could plan to protect their assets.

“We were not only protecting our business but trying to be compassionate to our customers and provide them with the tools they need,” Grundy said.

The response from the customers was overwhelming.

“We had customers emailing and calling to say thank you and tell us how much they loved having access to these tools,” Benoit said.

Once things started to stabilize and companies started to settle into remote work, AVTECH started to see business bounce back.

“More businesses started to take the approach of continuity and resilience planning and planning for the unexpected, and our products fit that mold very well,” Grundy said.

“We are fortunate to be in a position of being in tech that provides customers with the opportunity to have better awareness and protect their business and make them more resilient, and that resonated during COVID-19.”

AVTECH has become a leader in the Rhode Island exporting community during its 30-plus-year tenure. But its international business has seen exponential growth in the past year.

“The strong relationships we’ve built with our vendors that sell for us overseas are leading the charge about getting the word out about what we can do for customers,” Benoit said.

AVTECH has manufacturing facilities in Rhode Island and Pennsylvania, an international sales office in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, and an international distribution facility in Shannon, Ireland. In 2020, sales outside of North America grew by 70% compared with 2019, mainly due to AVTECH’s ability to deliver Room Alert quickly and much more affordably since products are shipping from the European Union instead of Rhode Island.

“We can reach our customers in ways most convenient for them better than our competition,” Grundy said. “The pandemic has allowed us to reimagine a more agile team structure and we will continue to try and leverage the most advantageous tools and adaptations. To start 2021 seeing incredible growth in all corners of the world as businesses come back to work and people recover ... we are proud to be able to have the reach in the world to provide these services.” ■



‘We were **in a unique position** to provide the capability to prevent downtime.’

RICHARD GRUNDY, AVTECH Software Inc. president and chief operating officer

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*Reader comments from the July 2020 CVC PBN subscriber survey.



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EXCELLENCE IN GREEN MANUFACTURING | BRADFORD SOAP WORKS INC.

OVERSEEING SOAPS: Robin Brown, group leader at Bradford Soap Works Inc., works on the production line at the West Warwick factory.
PBN PHOTO/RUPERT WHITELEY

Sustainability key part of soap maker's formula

BY JOHN A. LAHTINEN | Contributing Writer

SUSTAINABILITY IS AT THE VERY HEART of Bradford Soap Works Inc.'s strategic planning.

The West Warwick-based company has been creating and promoting sustainable formulations for more than 140 years since its founding in 1876. Bradford launched its Committed to Clean program in 2010 as a basis for its green manufacturing initiatives, with a comprehensive approach to responsible manufacturing in the areas of product, packaging, supply chain, energy, waste and emissions.

"We operate under the tenet 'people, planet and profit,' so we consider it a core pillar of our planning and operations," said Deb McDonough, Bradford's marketing vice president. "Sustainability is the foundation of our decisions, from sourcing to formulation development to waste management. We understand that sustainability goes beyond the product itself to encompass the entire product life cycle."

The commitment to making products that are good for both consumers and the environment carries over into everything Bradford does. While many soap manufacturers expand into liquid product lines, Bradford made the strategic decision to focus on solid formulations that use little to no water, including shampoo bars, solid moisturizers, cleansers and deodorants.

The company's core products are developed using ingredients with Environmental Working Group ratings of 3 or below. Bradford continues to work with manufacturers on innovation in sustainable ingredients and multiuse and recyclable packaging.

"We see green manufacturing as a competitive advantage," McDonough said. "Bradford

knows that the brands we serve have aggressive sustainability goals, and we see ourselves as their partner to help achieve them. For example, many of our customers, including Unilever, L'Oreal, Henkel, and Colgate-Palmolive, have signed the U.S. Plastics Pact, which calls for eliminating all unnecessary packaging by 2025 and mandates that plastic packaging will be 100% reusable, recyclable or compostable by 2025. Many of Bradford's products, including our shampoo bars, allow companies to eliminate plastic for that item altogether."

Assisting local and global communities not only helps Bradford move toward zero-waste but it also serves as a morale booster for its more than 350 employees. In 2020, the company donated 547 tons of scrap soap through Eco-Soap Bank and World Vision to help fight COVID-19 in the world's poorest communities. It also donated more than 100,000 bars of soap to local charities.

"Receiving thank-you letters and videos from the organizations we donated to makes us appreciate the value of the products we create, reminds us of our work's importance and brings smiles to our faces," McDonough said.

Of course, such a commitment to sustainability does not come without its share of challenges.

"Sustainable-sourcing is complex and there are often not established supply chains to support specific ingredients," said Stuart Benton, Bradford's CEO and president who is also this year's strategic leadership award winner. "We have learned that we often need to take the lead to help establish them."

A perfect example, he said, is palm oil.

There have long been concerns around the sourcing of palm oil, a core ingredient used in soap production, due to deforestation and the destruction of orangutan habitats. With no reliable supply chain in the U.S. to source identity-preserved palm oil, Bradford worked with the Rainforest Alliance to help certify a family-owned plantation in South America that grows sustainable palm oil.

Bradford figured out the logistics required to bring the palm oil directly to its West Warwick facility and has since launched more than 240 bar soaps using 100% traceable, Rainforest Alliance-certified sustainable palm oil, resulting in nearly 3 million pounds of sustainably sourced palm oil per year.

"Everyone has a role to play," Benton said. "We rely on our suppliers to bring us clean, sustainable ingredient options, and brands rely on us to develop products using sustainable formulations and packaging. Consumers look to the brands to provide products they feel good about that reflect their values. If everyone contributes where they can, it is much less daunting than trying to solve the entire equation yourself." ■



'Many of Bradford's products ... allow companies to eliminate plastic for that item altogether.'

DEB MCDONOUGH, Bradford Soap Works Inc. marketing vice president

BRADFORD

PROVIDENCE BUSINESS NEWS
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EXCELLENCE IN LEAN MANAGEMENT | COLONIAL MILLS INC.



MEANINGFUL MOVE: Gregg Scarlata, president and chief operating officer of Colonial Mills Inc., says increased efficiencies have helped grow the company's gross margins by more than 8% in the last three years.

PBN PHOTO/TRACY JENKINS

Home décor demand sews success for Colonial Mills

BY NANCY KIRSCH | Contributing Writer

ARE YOU SHOPPING ONLINE to make your “nest” cozier and more comfortable while you’re housebound due to the COVID-19 pandemic? If so, you may have purchased some of **Colonial Mills Inc.’s** home décor items, which include decorative storage baskets, ottomans and oval braided rugs.

Originally manufacturing only oval braided rugs, the second-generation family-owned business now makes additional items and has amassed some 25,000 stock-keeping units, or SKUs, which President and Chief Operating Officer Gregg Scarlata anticipates eventually increasing to 100,000.

“We lived in a small niche in the oval braided rug market,” said Scarlata, whose father, Donald, co-founded the company in 1977 and remains CEO and board chair.

Previously located in Pawtucket, Colonial Mills now operates in a 72,000-square-foot building that the company purchased in East Providence.

As the braided process offers additional applications, Colonial Mills works with designers to create custom products, which are sold to wholesalers, including Room and Board and Wayfair, and to consumers via its website.

With higher costs associated with domestic sourcing and production, Colonial Mills is a rarity in the rug manufacturing industry, which is dominated by imports from China and India. The company competes by offering a vast array of customized products, finding efficiencies and maximizing improvements, said Scarlata.

“We’re never going to win ... on volume,

but on manufacturing profitably,” Scarlata said, which is why lean manufacturing processes, which began with Donald Scarlata, are so meaningful. With efficiencies and overall processes increased tenfold due to lean manufacturing, Colonial Mills has grown its gross margins by more than 8% in the last three years.

“Just-in-time inventory gives us better, faster output, and we streamline the flow of process operations by striving for less waste, minimizing the distance each product has to move and shortening the walk times between different processes,” said Director of Manufacturing Operations William Guzman. “Every year, each department has a continuous improvement process analysis.”

From teaching lean manufacturing improvements, continuous improvement processes and a technique to train sewing machine operators faster, consulting firm Polaris MEP has been very valuable, Scarlata said.

“They taught us a World War II-era training technique ... that reduced our six-month training time for our sewing machine operators to four months,” added Guzman.

Beyond assistance from Polaris MEP, Colonial Mills received federal aid in the form of Paycheck Protection Program loan fund-

ing. Although Scarlata declined to disclose the amount, he said, “I can’t explain how important it was to have the cash on hand to continue to produce. We were at 50% capacity at one point, with an extremely high 28-day backlog,” with some employees staying home for family obligations or due to COVID-19 exposure.

Colonial Mills can employ up to 100 people and currently has 85 employees, who represent 16 different nationalities.

“Our employees are the lifeblood of this company,” Scarlata said. “All the manufacturing staff received pay increases last year, and we offered extended leave and financial assistance for those in need. We’re paying attention to people’s needs; lots of our employees have children. We told employees: ‘We understand that you have to take care of your life at home. If you need to take any time to be with your family, your job is not in jeopardy.’”

Scarlata gave credit to the company’s employees for how well Colonial performed last year. “The company’s success – even amidst COVID-19 – was all due to the unbelievable effort and heart our employees bring ... all the credit goes to our employees,” he wrote in the PBN Manufacturing Awards application.

Before 2020, about 90% of the company’s sales were in the wholesale market. Having more than doubled its direct-to-consumer sales to 25% of overall business last year, Colonial Mills has a goal of doubling that yet again in 2021, while continuing to capitalize on increased wholesale orders such as the ones it has received in the past several months. ■



‘The company’s success – even amidst COVID-19 – was all due to the **unbelievable effort and heart** our employees bring.’

GREGG SCARLATA, Colonial Mills Inc. president and chief operating officer

EXCELLENCE IN SAFETY PERFORMANCE & RECORDS

FINLAY EXTRACTS & INGREDIENTS USA INC.



EARLY ADOPTER: Miguel Rosario on the assembly line at Finlay Extracts & Ingredients USA Inc.
PBN PHOTO/RUPERT WHITELEY

Adherence to health and safety keeps Finlays incident-free

BY JOHN A. LAHTINEN | Contributing Writer

FINDING THE BALANCE between running a business in a COVID-19-clouded world and protecting its employees is of critical importance to **Finlay Extracts & Ingredients USA Inc.**, doing business as Finlays, a privately owned business-to-business supplier of tea, coffee and botanical solutions to beverage brand owners worldwide.

Finlays operates across the U.S., with locations in Rhode Island, Texas and New Jersey. The company has campuses in Lincoln, Cranston and North Kingstown at the Quonset Business Park, as well as a global commercial network covering the United Kingdom and Europe, Asia, Africa, the Middle East and the Commonwealth of Independent States.

In addition to its coffee and tea extracts being used within food and beverages as a base ingredient, Finlays also sources and provides soluble coffee, roasted coffee bean, green bean, leaf tea and soluble tea.

In the ongoing effort to reduce the risk of the coronavirus being brought into its facilities, Finlays' administrative personnel have all worked remotely since March 2020. In addition to implementing a pre-entry health screening process and building barriers to separate screeners from individuals entering the workplace, Finlays halted domestic and international business travel for the bulk of 2020.

"The health, well-being and safety of Finlays' workforce, both at home and in the workplace, is a vital component to the success of our business," said Shaun Galligan, Finlay's head of environmental, health and safety for the Americas. "An employee who feels their safety

and health are of importance to the business is more likely to be motivated and engaged in ... [environment, health and safety] programs.

"It is the responsibility of each employee to report unsafe work acts, occupational hazards, near-miss incidents, major or minor injuries, and instances where the air, water or soil could be adversely impacted due to our operations," Galligan said.

The company's manufacturing employees meet on a daily basis as part of the Operations Visual Management Board to discuss occupational health, safety and environmental issues. Additionally, employees are empowered to stop any work process in which an occupational hazard cannot be controlled or eliminated.

"The culture and climate at Finlays is such that we promote all employees to speak up with regards to issues they may have of a health and safety nature," said Julian Davies, chief operating officer for the Americas. "We aim to listen and respond accordingly and make investment where required. The health and safety of our employees is fundamental to our business. Our business is operated in accordance with a set of our core values, and our health and safety policies and procedures directly reflect those values."

The effort appears to be working. As of March 2021, the company's Rhode Island facilities have gone more than two years without an Occupational Safety and Health Administration recordable incident or an incident resulting in lost time, job transfer or restriction.

Finlays recently announced that its Rhode Island operations are now recognized by the International Organization for Standardization for certifying its ISO 45001 standard.

Businesses that receive this certification can ensure that their organization operates free of recognized occupational-related health and safety hazards. This assurance is validated by certifying that the business's occupational health and safety management systems are upheld to the 45001 standards and maintaining that certification year after year.

"Finlays' Rhode Island facilities are one of the first in the food and beverage industry to certify to the new ISO 45001 standard," Galligan said. "We are extremely proud of this, our performance at the Rhode Island sites, our aggressive management of COVID-19 and the organization's continued commitment to occupational health and safety."

In addition to keeping its highly trained and skilled operators working and producing, the company's focus on environment, health and safety brings with it an increase in customers.

"When an organization has a stellar safety record, it provides prospective customers the assurance that we operate in a compliant manner and are a socially responsible business," Galligan said. "Naturally, this contributes to our sales revenue." ■



'We promote **all employees to speak up** with regards to issues they may have of a health and safety nature.'

JULIAN DAVIES, Finlay Extracts & Ingredients USA Inc. chief operating officer for the Americas

EXCELLENCE AT A FAMILY-OWNED BUSINESS | ECO GLOBAL MANUFACTURING LLC



SWITCHING GEARS: Felis Franco, left, and Juan Arrojo load a sealer at Eco Global Manufacturing LLC in Providence. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the product design company switched gears to produce face shields and isolation gowns. PBN PHOTO/TRACY JENKINS

Eco Global brings PPE production back to U.S.

BY ANDY SMITH | Contributing Writer

ECO GLOBAL MANUFACTURING LLC is a third-generation product design and manufacturing company in Providence that started out as an upholstery company. It has since expanded into everything from pillows to chew toys for dogs.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Eco Global pivoted swiftly into the production of face shields and isolation gowns, using new production techniques and even creating custom machinery. The face shields have removable parts that allow for longer life and permit users to sanitize the areas that come into contact with the skin.

Eco Global President James Stallman said the pandemic revealed that the U.S. was dependent on China for the manufacture of personal protective equipment. The U.S. government was looking to bring that industry back to the U.S. and support small business at the same time. Eco Global fit the bill.

Continuing production during a pandemic has not been easy. Stallman said safety measures include socially distanced workspaces, temperature checks, questionnaires on health and symptoms, readily available PPE for employees, and lots of Zoom calls.

Eco Global has always been a believer in keeping manufacturing in the United States, and particularly Rhode Island.

“Our roots are deep in Rhode Island,” Stallman said. “We’re eternally hopeful that we will develop a more business-friendly climate for manufacturing ... it’s a challenging place to do business. Costs are very high – taxes, utilities.

But there are so many resources here, and access to such good people. It’s a question of our figuring out a way to control costs and be competitive.”

Eco Global’s story began with Stallman’s grandfather, Jack Stallman, an immigrant from Austria who started the American Upholstery Co. in Providence after World War I. After World War II, James Stallman’s father, Milton Harris Stallman, began M.H. Stallman Co., an upholstery supply company.

Its expertise with foam products led to work with Hasbro Inc. on its Nerf line of toys, as well as more high-tech and medical applications. Now Eco Global Manufacturing’s capabilities run to a wide gamut of products, including packing and packaging, medical devices, sports equipment, gaskets and seals and shoe insoles.

Stallman said the company is shifting its business model from supplying other businesses with equipment and parts to making and marketing its own products.

One enterprise Eco Global has been involved with is called Imagination Playground, a series of blue foam blocks and shapes, conceived by noted architect David Rockwell, that can be used in different configurations for kids to play. At first, Eco Global just manufactured the blocks, but it eventually acquired Rockwell’s

interest in the company.

With an expertise in foam, making pillows was a logical step for Eco Global. The foam is made from renewable resources, and the pillows were developed for Hope Lodges, the residential centers for cancer patients and families established by the American Cancer Society. The pillows are also sold to consumers.

Jason Riccardi, chief marketing officer for Eco Global, said the company is always looking to use its expertise to develop new ideas and products.

“We’re thinking about new products that make sense for us,” he said. “What can we do? What are we good at? Can we do this at a competitive price?”

Riccardi’s background is in the pet industry, and Eco Global makes a line of nylon chewable dog toys. A portion of the sales will go toward making women’s shelters pet friendly because research has found many women who need the shelters won’t leave their pets at home.

Social responsibility is a key value at Eco Global. The company has joined with similar corporations around the world to become a B-Corp., part of a group of more than 2,100 companies from 50 countries.

For Eco Global, being a B-Corp. means making environmentally friendly products in America. It’s also about providing jobs, training and workforce development to underserved local communities.

“We want to be here and do well in Rhode Island,” said Stallman when asked about the company’s long-term goals. ■



‘Our roots are deep in Rhode Island. ... There are **so many resources here**, and access to such good people.’

JAMES STALLMAN, Eco Global Manufacturing LLC president

COLLABORATION IN MANUFACTURING

WILLIAM M. DAVIES JR. CAREER & TECHNICAL HIGH SCHOOL



IN-CLASS INSTRUCTION: Briar Dacier, machine technology instructor at William M. Davies Jr. Career & Technical High School in Lincoln, with students Angel DeLaCruz and Mariama Barry in the machine lab. PBN PHOTO/TRACY JENKINS

Hands-on learning continues for Davies students during pandemic

BY JENNA PELLETIER | Contributing Writer

THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC hasn't stopped students at William M. Davies Jr. Career & Technical High School in Lincoln from gaining hands-on, work-based learning experiences at manufacturing sites throughout Rhode Island and nearby Massachusetts.

The graduating seniors in Davies' nine career-based concentration areas have already logged more than 20,000 hours of off-site work experience so far this school year, according to Susan Votto, the school's supervisor of career and technical education.

"It's about building relationships with industry people and listening to what their needs are and adapting our curriculum so we're meeting those needs," Votto said.

Since 2017, the school's number of work-based learning partnerships has increased by 60%, she said.

The school's Center for Advanced Manufacturing includes shops in electrical and renewable energy, biomanufacturing technology, machine technology and pre-engineering technology.

Students focusing on manufacturing have worked at West Warwick-based data visualization technology company AstroNova Inc., Lincoln-based grinding and cutting tool maker Bullard Abrasives and Providence-based badge and insignia producer Hook Fast Specialties. Students were also placed at Tracey Gear, Arch Global Precision, and Yushin America Inc.

Davies also has a strong ongoing partnership with the Rhode Island Manufacturers As-

sociation, which has helped its administrators connect with employers throughout the state.

"Davies has always placed students off-site into companies," Votto said. "We feel that's the most authentic way of students experiencing workplace learning."

Students are required to complete at least 80 hours of work-based learning before they graduate. Many of the jobs are paid, with rates ranging from \$12 to \$16 per hour. And it's not uncommon for students to receive a full-time job offer from their employer once they've graduated.

Zion Xavier, a senior studying machine technology, typically works from 3 to 9 p.m. at High Tech Stamping in Attleboro. His job involves performing quality control-related tasks for the company's earring parts manufacturing.

Xavier, who lives in Central Falls, typically works about 30 hours a week and makes \$16 per hour. His work-based learning experience has allowed him to apply concepts he has studied in the classroom and confirm that the field is a good fit for him, he said.

"It's great because it gets you started off with a real job early, rather than figuring out what you want to do after you graduate," he said.

At least 94% of the high school's graduates leave with industry certifications, Votto said. Non-manufacturing concentration areas include health careers, automotive, hospitality, and graphics and interactive media.

The many industry partners that work with Davies, including those on its advisory board, help shape the curriculum. In recent years, the school has started placing more emphasis on "work-readiness skills," including professionalism, collaboration, critical thinking and communication.

Students also receive industry-specific safety training to prepare for work outside of the classroom. For instance, sophomores studying biomanufacturing, electrical and renewable energy, and machine technology can become certified in the Occupational Safety and Health Administration's Outreach Training Program.

Strong COVID-19 protocols have allowed students to remain in Davies' classrooms and participate in its work-based learning programs this school year. The high school reopened in September with various measures, including the required use of a symptom-screening app, thermal cameras at each entrance of the school and strict social-distancing guidelines.

Students currently receive distance learning instruction on Mondays, attend in-person classes two days a week and complete asynchronous work the other two weekdays. For many students, that's in addition to working part-time businesses throughout the state.

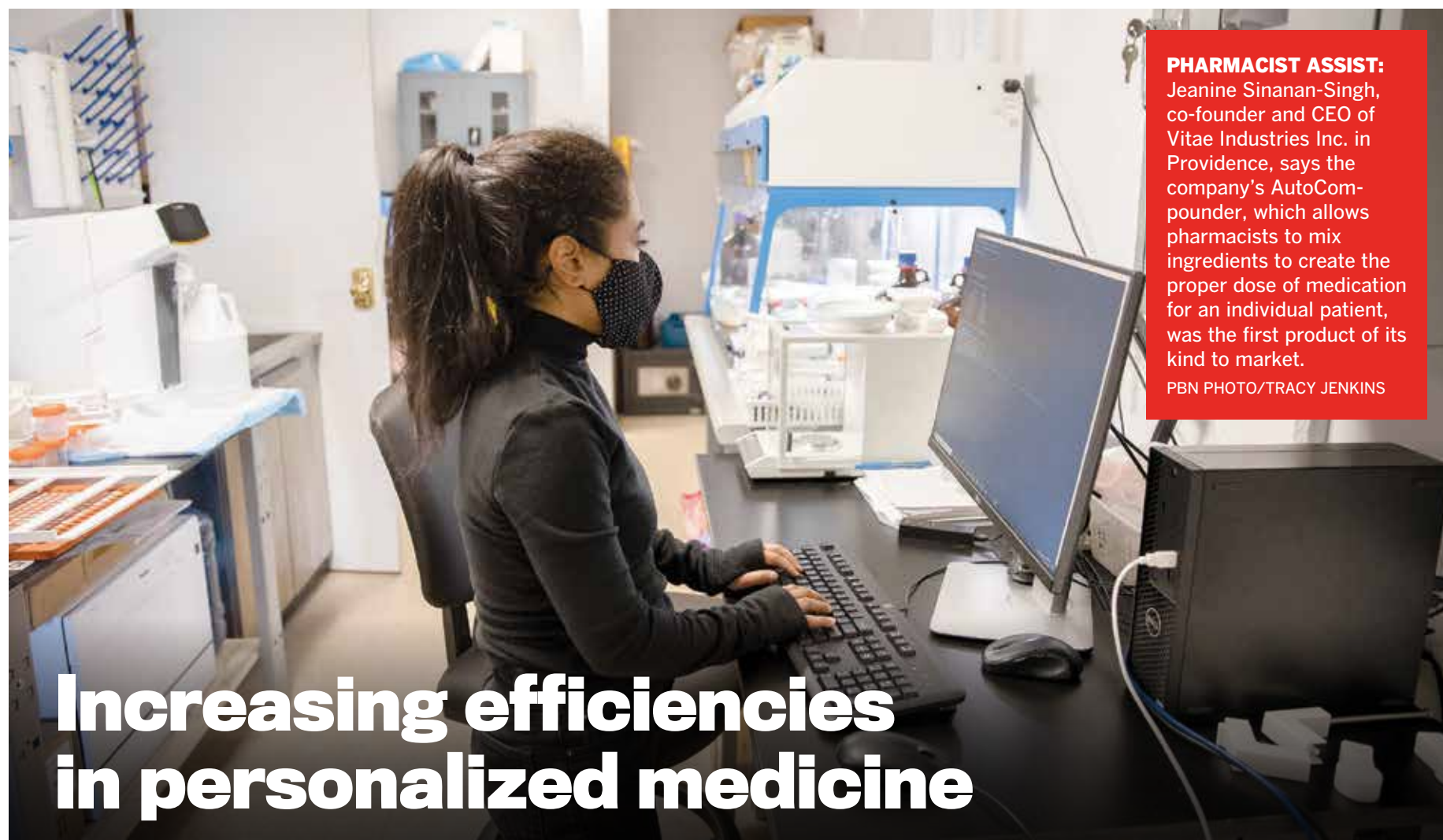
"The companies have been really flexible this year, which we are grateful for," Votto said. ■



"It's about **building relationships with industry people** and ... adapting our curriculum so we're meeting [their] needs.'

SUSAN VOTTO, William M. Davies Jr. Career & Technical High School supervisor of career and technical education

EMERGING MANUFACTURER | VITAE INDUSTRIES INC.

**PHARMACIST ASSIST:**

Jeanine Sinanan-Singh, co-founder and CEO of Vitae Industries Inc. in Providence, says the company's AutoCompounder, which allows pharmacists to mix ingredients to create the proper dose of medication for an individual patient, was the first product of its kind to market.

PBN PHOTO/TRACY JENKINS

Increasing efficiencies in personalized medicine

BY MATTHEW ENRIGHT | Contributing Writer

VITAE INDUSTRIES INC. works to promote efficiency in pharmacies with the assistance of its AutoCompounder product.

Drug compounding refers to “the process of combining, mixing or altering ingredients to create a medication tailored to the needs of an individual patient,” according to the Food and Drug Administration.

“Right now, most prescription medicines are one or a few sizes fits all, and while that might be right for some people, it’s also wrong for a large segment of the population,” said Daniel DeCiccio, co-founder and director of operations for the Providence-based manufacturer.

An example of this is the drug Ambien, which DeCiccio said was approved in the early 1990s and the FDA said there’s no gender bias, recommending both men and women should start at about 10 milligrams.

“And the problem is if you have a man and a woman of the same height, age, you control for every variable but gender, she gets two and a half times the amount of drug per that pill that he gets,” DeCiccio said. “It sends 5,000 women a year to the ER and more than doubled a woman’s mortality rate by simply taking the prescribed amount.”

Jeanine Sinanan-Singh, Vitae’s co-founder and CEO, said she was shocked that no one was tackling the problem.

“And as a result, we’ve been the first to market and there’s not really a better option available to these pharmacies to help improve this process to scale to personalized medications,” she said.

Personalized medication is the way forward for many drugs, including pediatric medications and hormone replacement therapies. The AutoCompounder helps pharmacists make individualized medications faster by automating the process of individualization.

“We wanted to take our backgrounds in computer science ... and bioengineering ... and bring those insights into the manual practice of making individualized medications for patients,” DeCiccio said. “When you talk about emerging, it’s emerging for us because we’re creating a high-quality production environment in a box that can function in a pharmacy or at a point of care.”

After a doctor forms the prescribed dosage through testing the patient, a pharmacist will program the AutoCompounder to create the actual dose. The 3D printer will print the dosage in the form of gummies, lozenges, suppositories or capsules, depending on the medication.

After assembling a team to test the prototype AutoCompounder from 2016-2018, Vitae began to sell it through trade shows and on-site visits in 2019. While the COVID-19 pandemic has been difficult and a challenge for everyone, DeCiccio noted that pharmacies have increasingly

turned to automation as demand increased.

“We’ve been doing our best to serve our customers, but little steps, I think, go a long way too,” DeCiccio said, “making sure we maintain social distancing in the office, making sure our supply chain is robust and won’t shut down because of the pandemic.”

Vitae has AutoCompounders in over 13,000 compound pharmacies in more than 15 states, including Rhode Island. Compound pharmacies personalize medications for their patients.

DeCiccio said Vitae is looking to continue its expansion and capitalize on the momentum built over the past few years.

“We see ourselves as the first one to provide personal, safe, affordable medications at the point of care. So, we see ourselves building off what we’ve learned over the past few years,” he said. “It took a lot of research in this industry, learning about our customers’ workflow, their needs, patient needs along the way, making sure we have a product addressing those needs.”

Among the obstacles Vitae has overcome is funding. DeCiccio said the company has received both grant funding and private investing, including from the state of Rhode Island and the National Institutes of Health.

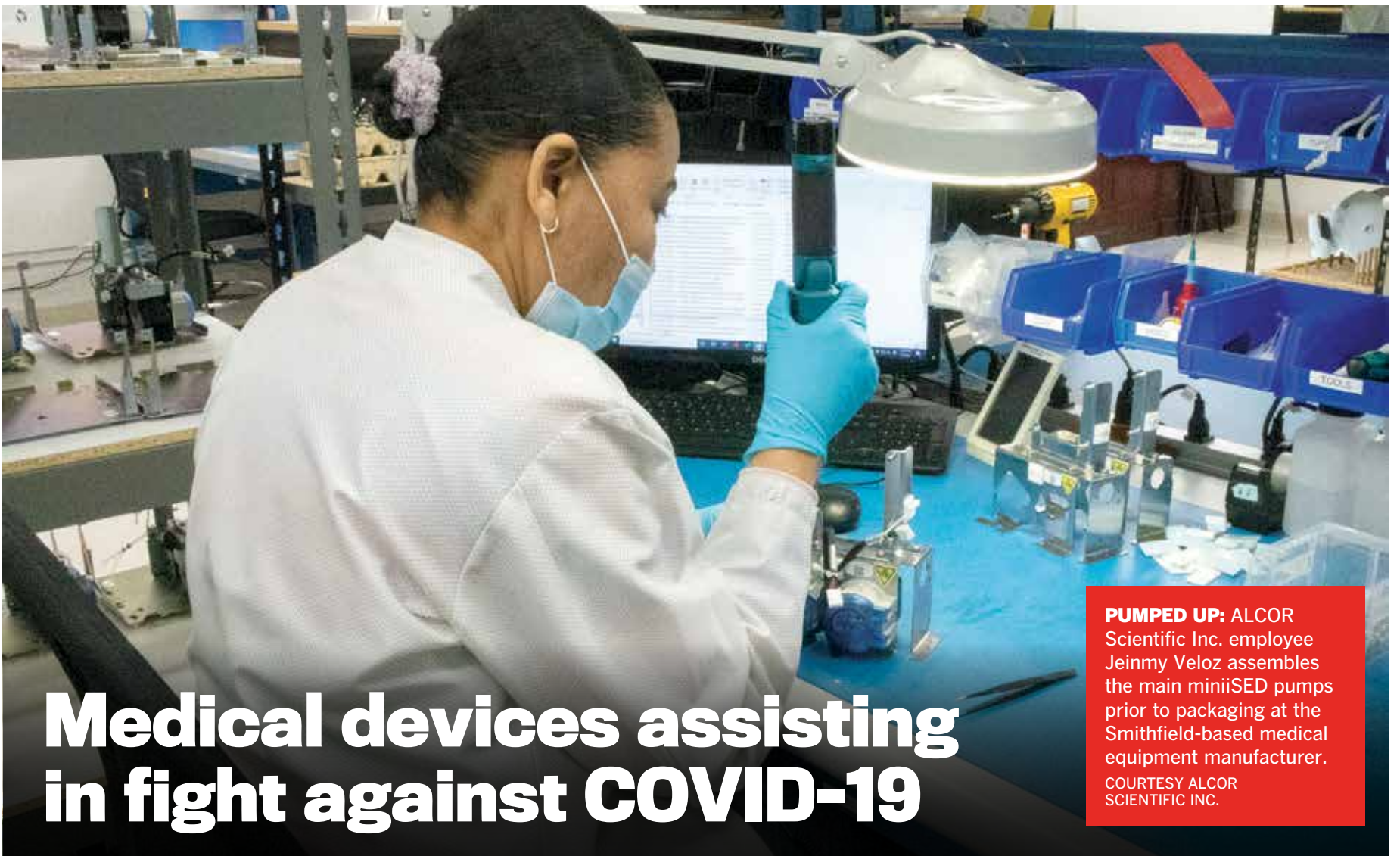
“It was a year of great change, and we met that change and we’ve been working with our customers to help get the right drugs to patients during this crazy time,” DeCiccio said. “When you really look at it, prescriptions should be personalized for patients. You get better outcomes, better patient satisfaction.” ■



‘We’re creating a **high-quality production environment** in a box that can function in a pharmacy or at a point of care.’

DANIEL DECICCIO, Vitae Industries Inc. co-founder and director of operations

ALCOR SCIENTIFIC INC. | EXCELLENCE IN PRODUCT INNOVATION & DESIGN



PUMPED UP: ALCOR Scientific Inc. employee Jeinmy Veloz assembles the main miniSED pumps prior to packaging at the Smithfield-based medical equipment manufacturer. COURTESY ALCOR SCIENTIFIC INC.

Medical devices assisting in fight against COVID-19

BY ANDY SMITH | Contributing Writer

ALCOR SCIENTIFIC INC. in Smithfield has managed to weather the COVID-19 pandemic thanks to a combination of product innovation, scrupulous safety practices and a product line that meets current medical needs.

"We've had a pretty successful year," said ALCOR CEO and President Karla Ruggeri said. The company, which has about 60 employees, designs and manufactures two different lines of medical equipment, both of which have been experiencing robust demand.

One is feeding pumps for people who are unable to feed themselves but still have functioning digestive systems. They can be used to provide nutrition when people are on ventilators.

The other is advanced analyzers for testing the erythrocyte sedimentation rate in blood, a key marker for inflammation. Although ESR testing is used in a wide variety of diagnoses, it can also monitor inflammation that can be associated with COVID-19.

The company, founded by Ruggeri's father, Carlo, was formed in 2010 from the merger of OST Medical Inc. and Diagnostic Systems Inc.

ALCOR essentially sells to two different sets of customers. The feeding pumps are used in institutions such as hospitals, nursing homes and rehab centers that treat patients who require external nutritional support. The ESR testing units go to labs at hospitals, clinics and doctor's offices.

Donna Woodall, head of sales and marketing for ALCOR, said product innovation is a key part of the company's philosophy.

In 2020, for example, ALCOR came out with a mini version of its ESR analyzer called the miniSED. The device's smaller size makes it ideal for physician offices, small labs and emergency clinics.

Ruggeri said the company is now working on a new feeding pump that can provide nutritional formula and water at the same time. The two can't be mixed, so right now patients either get their water through a syringe in their IV lines, or via a dual-pump system.

Of course the COVID-19 pandemic has meant extra precautions have been necessary to keep the ALCOR operation running. Masking, social distancing and sanitizing procedures are rigorously followed, employee temperatures are monitored twice a day, and ALCOR has hired a professional cleaning service. ALCOR can also provide its own COVID-19 testing.

Robert Lupo, chief financial officer for ALCOR, said employees in certain departments, such as sales, marketing, human resources, finance and administration, worked at home for about four months during the pandemic. Lupo said now everyone is back at the Smithfield headquarters, unless special circumstances, such as COVID-19 exposure, make working from home necessary.

Ruggeri said another change involved over-

seas sales. Because ALCOR sells to international markets, corporate representatives used to travel overseas to speak to distributors. That became impossible, so ALCOR had to adapt to using virtual platforms. While it took some getting used to, she said, it's been working well. When the pandemic wanes, though, company officials plan to resume overseas travel.

While the company is aware of the state's reputation as a tough place to do business, company officials point to some advantages.

Woodall said ALCOR has received a lot of encouragement and help from the R.I. Commerce Corp. and from Bryant University's John H. Chafee Center for International Business. "I've been very impressed with the way we are being engaged by different entities in the state," she said.

Woodall said ALCOR has been able to take advantage of some federally funded grants administered through Bryant to help support business activities.

Lupo said ALCOR has also been impressed by the quality of the people it has been able to hire in Rhode Island, including some Bryant graduates.

Ruggeri said ALCOR will continue its product innovations, and plans to grow over the next few years, including expanding the workforce. She said that even as the immediate threat of COVID-19 fades, medical facilities are now very aware of potential dangers and will want to be prepared for whatever may come. ■



"I've been very impressed with the way we are being **engaged by different entities** in the state."

DONNA WOODALL, ALCOR Scientific Inc. head of sales and marketing

EXCELLENCE IN WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT & PRODUCTIVITY | AMERISEWN



IN CONTROL: From left, Jennifer Lyons, operations; John Caito III, founder and president; and Layne Mayer, director of growth, at Amerisewn in Cranston. PBN PHOTO/TRACY JENKINS

Amerisewn teams with We Make RI on training program for sewers

BY JENNA PELLETIER | Contributing Writer

RIOT SUITS, MATERNITY BELTS, boat seats. Those are just a few of the many products manufactured by Cranston-based **Amerisewn**.

Founded by John Caito III in 1982, the sewing company uses textiles, foams and gels to manufacture stitched products for military, law enforcement, medical and industrial customers.

"People come to us because they want USA-made," said Layne Mayer, Amerisewn's director of growth.

Military-related items, including combat training gear, packs and pouches, account for at least half of the company's business. It also makes protective vests for law enforcement officers, safety pads used in mental health care settings and consumer goods such as protective cases.

This year Amerisewn expanded its manufacturing space by 8,500 square feet and added new digital cutting capabilities. Digital cutting allows the company to digitize its own patterns and keep all cutting in-house, giving it more control over costs and timing.

But the past year has also brought some challenges.

"[It] was a struggle with a drop in revenue from some of our existing large customers, while at the same time growing with new customers and adding equipment and people," Mayer said.

It can be difficult to find qualified sewers, she added. "It's sort of like a dying art," she said.

To solve the problem, Amerisewn recently

teamed up with the nonprofit organization We Make RI to create a sewing training program. Together, the organizations designed a three-week course of study.

"We source the students, train them and spend the last week getting them up to production speed," said Rachel Menard, director of marketing communications for We Make RI. "In their final stages, John from Amerisewn comes in to meet with the candidates and by the time they're done with training, they have a job."

So far, Amerisewn has hired four employees through the program.

"Working with We Make RI just made sense," said Caito, president of Amerisewn. "We are continuously growing and looking for employees that want to grow in our organization. By helping We Make RI craft a program to train stitchers, it gives us, and other contract sewers in Rhode Island, a pipeline of vetted employees."

Amerisewn employees typically work in teams, also known as pods. A new hire usually starts in the company's hernia belt program. Once their skills are up to speed, they are assigned to another project-based pod.

"Each pod has a team leader that guides and supports each employee to success," Mayer said. "We work hard to funnel people into teams where they fit in with the people and projects that match their skill set."

Such flexibility has helped Amerisewn retain employees, some of whom have been with the company for more than a decade. In all, the company employs 58 people.

"We have a great culture," Mayer said. "People generally want to work hard and grow."

Amerisewn has implemented several measures to keep its workforce safe and healthy during the COVID-19 pandemic. Everyone must wear a mask while working and machines have been spread out to accommodate for social distancing. The company also moved to offering employees multiple break and lunch times to reduce the number of people sitting in an area at once.

In addition, the company regularly checks employees' temperatures and offers in-house COVID-19 testing, provided by the state. Working in a pod structure has helped Amerisewn employees keep track of their close work contacts as well.

"We have made sure that our staff feels that their safety is paramount and make sure that all employees follow the guidelines to the benefit and respect of all," Mayer said.

Some of the company's competitors have shut down during the pandemic, she added.

"That's actually been a huge opportunity for us," Mayer said. "Because we've handled things well, we've not only been able to stay open but add a few new brands as well." ■

AMERI//SEWN

'We work hard to funnel people into teams where they fit in with the people and projects that match their skill set.'

LAYNE MAYER, Amerisewn director of growth

G-FORM LLC | PUBLISHER'S CHOICE AWARD FOR INNOVATIVE ADAPTATION



WRAPPING UP: Will Thomas, machine operator at athletic protective gear manufacturer G-Form LLC in North Smithfield, performs the final step in the machine process by applying the backer material just before the station will be closed and molded.

PBN PHOTO/RUPERT WHITELEY

Pivot to PPE keeps G-Form competing

BY MARY LHOWE | Contributing Writer

WHEN PUBLIC LIFE and most commerce slammed shut in March 2020 because of COVID-19, the message for **G-Form LLC**, a manufacturer of athletic protective gear such as knee and elbow pads, was stark and unambiguous.

Team sports shut down overnight, orders stopped and it looked like the North Smithfield factory could go dark.

The first thought for CEO Glen Giovanucci and G-Form's managers in Providence was how to keep the company's 70 employees working and earning. The company came up with a plan to keep production rolling, while also serving the medical community, by making personal protective equipment. But G-Form's options were limited, as it lacked the sewing capabilities needed for masks, and making hand sanitizer would have been problematic.

Giovanucci recalled seeing a TV news report in which a nurse was being interviewed. "She pulled her mask up onto her head and I could see the lines that the face mask had creased into her skin," he said. "I thought, 'We have to help these people.'"

The company decided to recalibrate its production methods, supply lines and customer base to make face shields. G-Form has made and sold about 2 million face shields since last April, Giovanucci said.

The work to retool the factory and to find supplies and customers moved quickly. An article by The Associated Press as early as April 17 described how G-Form was already making and shipping face shields.

Soon, the revised enterprise expanded to

include five partner companies, all of them nearby manufacturers, logistics or supply-chain experts whose executives had heard about G-Form's retrofit and offered to be part of the work. They included Atlantic Footcare, Ocean State Book Binding, The Beck Cos., VPI and Larsen.

Giovanucci said those companies approached G-Form offering workers and production space, hoping to keep more of their own people employed. The collaboration made higher levels of production possible, he said.

Giovanucci estimated that the face shield production ultimately saved 225 to 250 jobs across all the partner companies. "We contributed to helping them stay alive," he said of the partner businesses.

Revising the company's production from sports gear to face shields was not a snap. G-Form did not have supply chains in place for some needs, such as elastic and certain rivets. The company eventually developed a relationship with 3M as a source for plastic, but "we didn't have experience with them; we were at the bottom of their list, and it was cash upfront" at first, Giovanucci said.

He said the company's movement into

making face shields did not create a financial windfall. "We offset what we would have done [in production and sales] in our normal protective gear business. We didn't take advantage of the situation and jack up our prices. We maintained normal margins. Our motive was to keep going and to keep our employees working."

Rob Kelley, G-Form's vice president of global marketing, said once the decision was made to manufacture face shields, the staff had to jump into some unfamiliar terrain. "It took a lot of research; it was a quick study for all of us," Kelley said. "It was an incredible team-building exercise."

The most difficult piece was building a new supply chain for some materials, especially since some manufacturers of raw materials had shut down. "It was all hands on deck," Kelley said. "We had to find labels for the face shields. We had people driving to printing plants and bringing labels back in their cars."

Both Giovanucci and Kelley expect the company to return to its core business of protective sports equipment after the pandemic ends.

However, new relationships and developments have come about for the company because of its pivot in 2020. G-Form is working with Pyramid Manufacturing, a Rhode Island textile operation, to make heavy-duty gloves for industrial use. That development, Giovanucci said, could lead to more initiatives in creating protective gear for military, industrial and law enforcement needs.

"We look back on 2020 with pride," Kelley said. "It really tested our resiliency." ■



'We offset what we would have done [in production and sales] in our normal protective gear business.'

GLEN GIOVANUCCI, G-Form LLC CEO

MANUFACTURING CHAMPION | KARL WADENSTEN, CEO AND PRESIDENT, VIBCO INC.



TRAILBLAZER: Karl Wadensten, CEO and president of VIBCO Inc. in Richmond, was one of the first to create the blueprints for how to safely operate a manufacturing facility during COVID-19 and conduct employee and visitor screening. PBN PHOTO/RUPERT WHITELEY

Wadensten gives helping hand to companies, communities

BY JENNIFER L. GRYBOWSKI | Contributing Writer

VIBCO INC. CEO and President Karl Wadensten is a well-known name throughout the manufacturing industry in Rhode Island, and beyond.

He was nominated by the Rhode Island Manufacturers Association Advisory Council and the RIMA board of directors for the PBN manufacturing champion award after they received numerous letters, calls and emails of support from companies in all kinds of industries for his efforts.

“Karl is the poster child for what the manufacturing sector stands for,” said David M. Chenevert, RIMA executive director. “He was just outstanding through the pandemic; he embraced taking care of his employees with the COVID-19 programs he implemented.”

The manufacturers association credits Wadensten with keeping more than 1,600 manufacturers in the state open during the pandemic by using the guidelines from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, World Health Organization, Occupational Safety and Health Administration and the state, providing the template for the Manufacturing Pledge.

Wadensten was also one of the first to create the blueprints for how to safely operate a manufacturing facility during COVID-19 and conduct employee and visitor screening. He also sourced personal protective equipment for every industry, including hospitals.

“He’s a real strong, vocal individual,” Chenevert said. “He’s not afraid of speaking out and exhibiting that support for our industry.”

Wadensten said he knew he had to do whatever he could to keep his employees safe

and getting a paycheck during the crisis last spring.

“To be a true servant leader – our company, myself, our people – you are here to serve customers outside and people inside,” Wadensten said. “Whatever we can do, teach, share, learn, give and see people excel at and do better with that knowledge and information makes me feel full. We help inform them and give them a piece of our DNA.”

Part of Wadensten’s magnetism is that he is excited to share what he’s learned with anyone who wants to know about it. During the pandemic, hundreds of companies reached out to Richmond-based VIBCO to ask about its processes and how it was staying open.

“We stop what we are doing and help them,” Wadensten said. “The highest currency of letting us know we are doing a good job is a ‘thank you’ and watching them implement something we’ve taught them.”

Wadensten also stopped what he was doing and delivered food to people who needed it during the pandemic, as well as drove supplies where they needed to be. Chenevert said he

wasn’t at all surprised to find Wadensten helping others.

“He led the charge in helping out smaller companies,” Chenevert said. “He reached out and gave direct assistance. That’s the kind of guy he is. He goes above and beyond what others are doing.”

Wadensten is a prolific supporter of lean manufacturing, a methodology to reduce waste in a manufacturing system while bolstering productivity. He uses lean concepts to motivate and manage his team.

“We are trying to make things operationally better and that permeates through the whole organization,” Wadensten said. “When you walk through the door, your job is to improve. If I don’t ooze that out of my body, then it’s just baloney. You want to follow someone like that. I learn from people all the time. We feed off of each other, so we get better every day.”

Wadensten also credits lean processes to keeping his business successful.

“We’d be so out of business if we weren’t [lean],” he said. “There are so many pressures to make things at higher quality and faster, and we wouldn’t be able to do that without understanding the process. We have happy customers because we don’t have long wait times. If we weren’t efficient, we’d need double the people. We’ve been able to hold our prices for our customers for the past two or three years, and through the pandemic, because we cut out the waste of things and reinvest in equipment and people.” ■



‘He’s a **real strong, vocal individual**. He’s not afraid of speaking out and exhibiting that support for our industry.’

DAVID M. CHENEVERT, Rhode Island Manufacturers Association executive director

MANUFACTURERS (ranked by number of local employees)

2021 rank	Company Website CEO/President	Address Phone	No. of local employees	Products
1 2020: 1	General Dynamics Electric Boat gdeb.com Phebe Novakovic, chairman and CEO; Kevin M. Graney, president	165 Dillabur Ave. North Kingstown, R.I. 02852 (401) 268-2300	4,200	Design, construction and life cycle support of submarines for the U.S. Navy
2 2020: 2	Raytheon IDS raytheon.com Thomas Kennedy, chairman and CEO, Raytheon Co.; Wesley Kremer, president, IDS	1847 West Main Road Portsmouth, R.I. 02871 (401) 842-5438	1,039	Electronic and weapons systems integrator for the U.S. Navy and international navies
3 2020: 6	Blount Fine Foods Corp. blountfinefoods.com Todd Blount, president	630 Currant Road Fall River, Mass. 02720 (774) 888-1300	946	Manufacturing and marketing of gourmet soups and sides, and meals
4 2020: 8	Amgen Inc. amgen.com Robert Bradley, chairman and CEO; Brian Britson, Rhode Island site vice president of operations	40 Technology Way West Greenwich, R.I. 02817 (401) 392-1200	903	Developer and manufacturer of biopharmaceuticals
5 2020: 3	Sensata Technologies Inc. sensata.com Jeffrey Cote, president, sensing solutions, and chief operating officer ¹	529 Pleasant St. Attleboro, Mass. 02703 (508) 236-3800	900	Custom-engineered sensors and controls, including Airpax, DeltaTech, Dimensions, Klixon, Qinx, Schrader and Sensor-NITE
6 2020: 4	Joseph Abboud Manufacturing Corp. josephabboud.com Joseph Bahena, senior vice president	689 Belleville Ave. New Bedford, Mass. 02745 (508) 999-1301	837	Joseph Abboud sportcoats, suits and trousers
7 2020: 7	Toray Plastics (America) Inc. toraytpa.com Akihiro Nikkaku, CEO, president and chief operating officer, Toray Industries Inc.; Michael Brandmeier, CEO and president, Toray Plastics (America) Inc.	50 Belver Ave. North Kingstown, R.I. 02852 (401) 294-4511	705	Polyester and polypropylene film manufacturing
8 2020: NL	Schneider Electric schneider-electric.com Annette Clayton, North America CEO and president	132 Fairgrounds Road South Kingstown, R.I. 02892 (401) 789-5735	578	Energy-management and efficiency technologies
9 2020: 9	Tiffany & Co. ² tiffany.com Alessandro Bogliolo, CEO	300 Maple Ridge Drive Cumberland, R.I. 02864 (401) 288-0100	548	Bracelets, charms, engagement rings, home accessories, necklaces, NFL Vince Lombardi Trophy, watches
10 2020: 11	Taco Inc. ³ taco-hvac.com John Hazen White Jr., chairman and CEO; Cheryl Merchant, president	1160 Cranston St. Cranston, R.I. 02920 (401) 942-8000	500	Circulators, controls, pumps and valves for HVAC systems
11 2020: 10	Teknor Apex Co. teknorapex.com Jonathan D. Fain, Chairman and CEO; Suresh Swaminathan, President	505 Central Ave. Pawtucket, R.I. 02861 (401) 725-8000	496	Custom compounder of advanced polymer materials
12 2020: 13	LeachGarner leachgarner.com Tom Kimble, president	49 Pearl St. Attleboro, Mass. 02703 (800) 225-2706	460	Precious-metal raw materials (Stern Metals), chain (Excell) and jewelry products (General Findings)
13 2020: 15	Amtrol Inc. amtrol.com Greg Shakley, general manager	1400 Division Road West Warwick, R.I. 02893 (401) 884-6300	396	HVAC: Extrols, Therm-x-Trols, pressure-rated cylinders; water systems: well-water systems, water treatment
14 2020: 14	Systems Engineering Associates Corp. ⁴ seacorp.com Brian Gilligan, owner and CEO; David Lussier, president	62 Johnnycake Hill Road Middletown, R.I. 02842 (401) 847-2260	384	Systems and software engineering, program and financial management, research and development
15 2020: 16	AstroNova Inc. astronovainc.com Gregory Woods	600 East Greenwich Ave. West Warwick, R.I. 02893 (401) 828-4000	380	Manufacturer of associated software and consumables, data-acquisition systems, specialty printers
16 2020: 17	Technic Inc. technic.com David Weisberg	47 Molter St. Cranston, R.I. 02910 (401) 781-6100	372	Analytical control systems, custom finishing equipment, engineered powders, specialty chemicals
17 2020: 18	KVH Industries Inc. kvh.com Martin A. Kits van Heyningen, CEO	50 Enterprise Center Middletown, R.I. 02842 (401) 847-3327	275	Mobile satellite communications, TV antenna systems, precision navigation products for defense and commercial applications
18 2020: 26	Bradford Soap Works Inc. bradfordsoap.com Stuart Benton	200 Providence St. West Warwick, R.I. 02893 (401) 821-2141	267	Bar soap and other solid cleansing products, including shampoos/conditioners, shave and shower poufs
19 2020: 19	igus inc. igus.com Richard Abbate, vice president	257 Ferris Ave. East Providence, R.I. 02916 (800) 521-2747	261	Adapter plates, custom cables, custom and standard metal brackets, and energy chain components
20 2020: 20	Hexagon Manufacturing Intelligence hexagonmi.com Angus Taylor, president, Hexagon Manufacturing Intelligence, North America	250 Circuit Drive North Kingstown, R.I. 02852 (401) 886-2000	260	3D laser scanners, computer-aided engineering/manufacturing software
20 2020: 20	Brookwood Finishing ⁵ brookwoodcos.com Amber Brookman, chairman and CEO; Regina Gallo Marquart, president	36 Sherman Ave. Richmond, R.I. 02836 (401) 364-3400	260	Commission finisher of woven synthetic fabrics for consumer, industrial and military markets
22 2020: 22	Herff Jones Inc. herffjones.com Jeff Webb, chairman and CEO	150 Herff Jones Way Warwick, R.I. 02888 (401) 331-1240	250	Customized emblematic awards, plaques and trophies, championship and commercial awards, high school and college class rings
22 2020: 23	Infinity Fresh Kitchen retailbusinessservices.com Roger Wheeler, president, retail business services	320 Commerce Park Road North Kingstown, R.I. 02852 (617) 770-6996	250	Food products

CLOSER LOOK

Total number of local employees:
20,469

LIST RESEARCHED BY
James Bessette

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NL = Not listed last year.

FOOTNOTES
① Replaced Martha Sullivan on March 1, 2020.
② Tiffany & Co. was acquired by Moët Hennessy - Louis Vuitton, Societe Europeenne, also known as LVMH, on Nov. 25, 2019.
③ Also known as Taco Comfort Solutions.
④ Also known as SEA Corp.
⑤ Previously listed as Kenyon Industries Inc.

MANUFACTURERS (ranked by number of local employees)

2021 rank	Company Website CEO/President	Address Phone	No. of local employees	Products
24 2020: 24	Nordson EFD nordsonefd.com Sundaram Nagarajan, CEO and president, Nordson Corp.; Srinivas Subramanian, vice president and general manager, Nordson EFD	40 Catamore Blvd. East Providence, R.I. 02914 (800) 556-3484	248	Precision fluid-dispensing solutions
25 2020: NL	Ahead LLC aheadweb.com Anne Broholm, CEO	270 Samuel Barnet Blvd. New Bedford, Mass. 02745 (508) 985-9898	238	Branded golf apparel, headwear and accessories
26 2020: 12	Becton, Dickinson and Co. ¹ bd.com Michael Garrison	100 Crossings Blvd. Warwick, R.I. 02886 (800) 556-6275	228	Medical devices
27 2020: 27	International Packaging Corp. interpak.com John Kilmartin, owner and CEO	517 Mineral Spring Ave. Pawtucket, R.I. 02860 (401) 724-1600	200	Custom-made branded presentation boxes, displays and packaging
27 2020: 27	V.H. Blackinton & Co. blackinton.com Peter Roque, CEO and chief operating officer	221 John L. Dietsch Blvd. Attleboro, Mass. 02763 (800) 699-4436	200	Custom metal badges, commendation bars, FlexBadge metallic emblems, medals
29 2020: 29	Tanury Industries tanury.com Michael Akkaoui	6 New England Way Lincoln, R.I. 02865 (401) 333-9400	190	Electroplating, PVD and Cerakote coatings
30 2020: 25	Hope Global hopeglobal.com Marcelino De Santiago, president and chief operating officer	50 Martin St. Cumberland, R.I. 02864 (401) 753-7800	185	Manufacturer of automotive, apparel and industrial products
31 2020: 30	Arnold Lumber Co. arnoldlumber.com Allison Arnold and Kate Arnold Carret, co-presidents	251 Fairgrounds Road South Kingstown, R.I. 02892 (401) 783-2266	175	Sales and distribution of building materials, primarily to residential and commercial contractors
32 2020: 31	General Cable Corp. prysmiangroup.com Valerio Battista, CEO, Prysmian Group; Paulo Gabrielli, Lincoln plant manager	3 Carol Drive Lincoln, R.I. 02865 (401) 333-4848	172	Wire and cable manufacturer
33 2020: 32	Mahr Inc. mahr.com Bryan Orr, vice president of sales for the Americas, executive director	1144 Eddy St. Providence, R.I. 02905 (401) 784-3100	170	Dimensional metrology equipment and gauges; provides calibration and contract measurement services
34 2020: 33	Nye Lubricants Inc. ² nyelubricants.com George Mock	12 Howland Road Fairhaven, Mass. 02719 (508) 996-6721	165	Damping greases, NyeClean, NyeMed, NyeTorr, RheoLube, UniFlor-PFPE lubricants
35 2020: 34	Tri-Mack Plastics Manufacturing Corp. trimack.com Ed Mack, CEO	55 Broadcommon Road, Unit 1 Bristol, R.I. 02809 (401) 253-2140	160	Components for the aerospace, chemical processing, electronics and industrial equipment markets; engineered thermoplastics
36 2020: 40	Nelipak Healthcare Packaging ³ nelipak.com Roger Prevot, chairman and CEO; Pat Chambliss, chief operating officer	21 Amflex Drive Cranston, R.I. 02921 (401) 946-2699	151	Medical trays and pharmaceutical packaging
37 2020: 35	Safe Harbor New England Boatworks LLC shmarinas.com Baxter Underwood, CEO; Rives Potts, president	1 Lagoon Road Portsmouth, R.I. 02871 (401) 683-4000	150	Boats
37 2020: 35	WaterRower waterrower.com Peter King, CEO	520 Metacom Ave. Warren, R.I. 02885 (401) 247-7742	150	Indoor rowing fitness machines
39 2020: NL	Ximedica ximedica.com Robert Brown, CEO	55 Dupont Drive Providence, R.I. 02907 (401) 330-3163	145	Product-development services for medical device and health care companies
40 2020: 39	John Matouk & Co. matouk.com George Matouk Jr., CEO	925 Airport Road Fall River, Mass. 02720 (508) 997-3444	135	Fine bed and bath linens
40 2020: 37	Finlay Extracts & Ingredients USA Inc. finlays.net Michele Abo, CEO	10 Blackstone Valley Place and 81 Ocean State Drive Lincoln and North Kingstown, R.I. 02865 and 02852 (401) 333-3300	135	Coffee, syrups, coffee extracts, tea extracts, coffee on demand
42 2020: 37	Cooley Group ⁴ cooleygroup.com Daniel Dwight	50 Esten Ave. Pawtucket, R.I. 02860 (401) 724-9000	130	Manufacturer of coated fabrics and polymer membranes
43 2020: NL	Anvil & Smith-Cooper International anvileps.com Tom Fish, board chairman; Jason Hild, CEO	160 Frenchtown Road North Kingstown, R.I. 02852 (401) 886-3000	125	Engineered pipe supports for the power industry, both nuclear and commercial
44 2020: 41	Contech Medical contechmedical.com Raymond Byrnes, CEO; Christopher Byrnes, president	99 Hartford Ave. Providence, R.I. 02909 (401) 351-4890	110	Medical-device manufacturer
44 2020: 41	NFI Corp. nficorp.com Renaud Megard	213 Theodore Rice Blvd. New Bedford, Mass. 02745 (508) 998-9021	110	Graphic overlays, labels, membrane switches, sleeves
44 2020: 41	Dryvit Systems Inc. dryvit.com R. Michael Murphy	1 Energy Way and 200 Frenchtown Road West Warwick and North Kingstown, R.I. 02893 and 02852 (800) 556-7752	110	Adhesives and base coats, air/vapor/water barriers, metallic coating, NewBrick, primers and sealers accessories, textured finishes

CLOSER LOOK

Just missed the list:

1 (tie)
VIBCO Inc.
No. of employees: **100**

1 (tie)
Yushin America Inc.
No. of employees: **100**

3
Swarovski Optik North America Ltd.
No. of employees: **99**

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James Bessette

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NL = Not listed last year.

FOOTNOTES
① Also known as BD.

② Nye Lubricants Inc. was acquired by the FUCHS Group of Dissen, Germany, on Dec. 31, 2019.

③ Nelipak Healthcare Packaging was acquired by Kohlberg & Co. LLC of Mt. Kisco, N.Y., on July 3, 2019. The company merged with Bemis Healthcare Packaging Europe on Aug. 8, 2019, and the combined company will operate under the Nelipak Healthcare Packaging brand.

4 Cooley Group was acquired by its executive leadership in collaboration with J.H. Witney Capital Partners, a private-equity firm, on Jan. 4.

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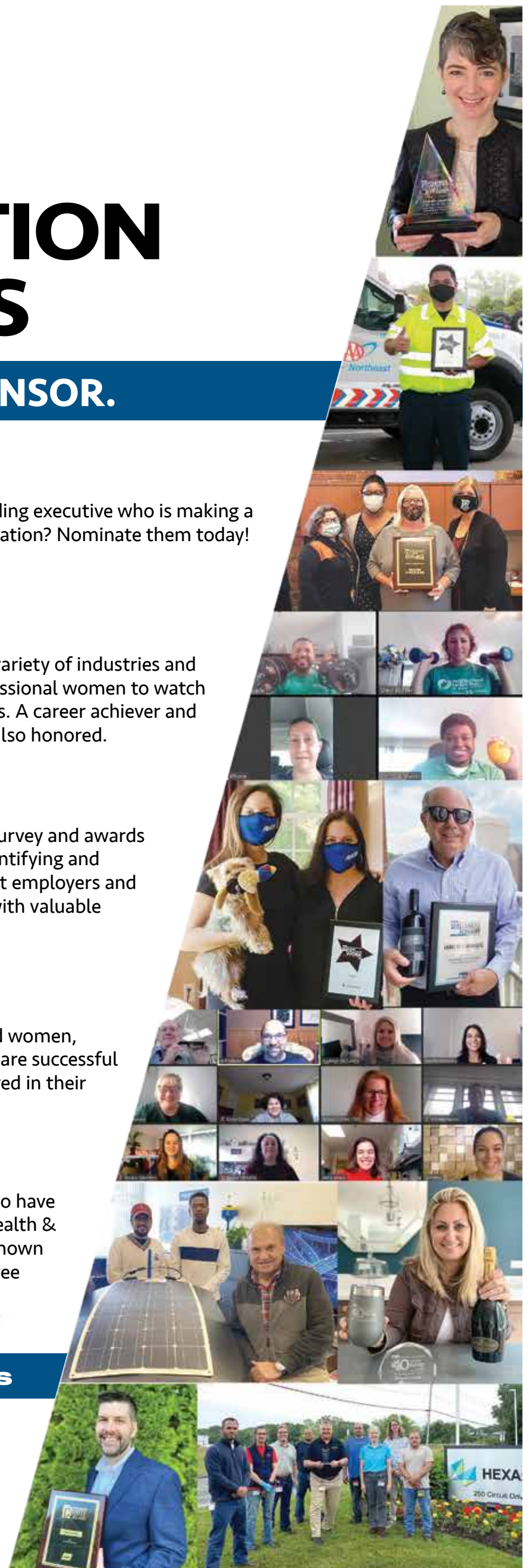
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