

SPECIAL REPORT

Medical

Geared up for growth

MRPC readies for successful '10 with strategic additions

By Brad Dawson

Rubber & Plastics News Staff

BUTLER, Wis.—Medical molding firm MRPC used 2009 to “reinvent in and re-trench” its expertise and core capabilities, setting up 2010 as a year for improved growth.

The company's last fiscal year wasn't

a great one compared to the recent past, but it wasn't terrible, either, said MRPC President Greg Riemer. The firm was able to attain a significant ISO certification, add key personnel and gain some customers based on subassembly work it's doing more frequently.

The outfit also is primed for opportunities in 2010, with plans to add injection molding machines and secondary operations equipment, Riemer said.

Steps to prepare

MRPC gained ISO 13485 certification in 2009, which meets standards for a comprehensive management system for designing and manufacturing medical devices. The company found that its customers, who produce the medical devices it makes parts for, want their partners to meet the same high regulatory standards they do, MRPC said.

The Butler-based firm, which already was ISO 9001-certified, believes ISO 13485 will become a standard requirement of medical device makers within three to five years. “MRPC wanted to jump ahead of the curve to demonstrate that we offer our customers the best and most efficient services today,” said Michael Dalton, the company's director of quality.

On the personnel side, the biggest change has been Riemer being named president of MRPC, effective Jan. 1. Riemer, a 13-year company veteran who is the grandson of the manufacturer's founder, first joined the company in 1990 and previously served as chief operating officer and vice president of sales and marketing.

“MRPC has made many tremendous technological advancements and we have a great team throughout,” he said. “We're on the leading edge of a growing industry, and I'm really excited about our prospects.”

CEO John Schlump said Riemer's hands-on experience—particularly coming during the worst recession of this generation—and his 20 years in the plastic, rubber and silicone molding sector provide him with the appropriate tools to lead MRPC.

“During the last three years, Greg has built an executive leadership team to support the strategic growth plan for the company,” said Schlump, who plans to step down from his position in June.

The most recent hires include Brunson Parish as a senior process engineer and Shane Mesenberg as MRPC's Upper Midwest territory manager, both of whom joined the company last fall. Parish is the eighth engineer on staff—up from five only two years ago—and he brings an expertise in scientific injection molding to the firm.

“We've dabbled in scientific molding technology a bit, but now we have the resources to move forward aggressively, both on the silicone and thermoplastic sides of the business,” Riemer said.

Mesenberg, with 14 years of plastic molding industry experience, focuses on the Minneapolis area and the medical

device marketplace in his position. Mark Brandstaetter, MRPC vice president of sales and marketing, said Mesenberg brought a wealth of contacts and is doing a great job in his short stint with the company. “He's a great fit for us,” Brandstaetter said.

Riemer said the ability to attract good engineering and sales help was one positive result from the economy being in a downturn and affecting other's businesses. “We may not have been able to get the people we did in a stronger market,” he said.

MRPC's employment fluctuates between 95 and 100, depending on the amount of business in the facility.

Gaining business

With capabilities for silicone, rubber and plastic molding, MRPC has over the past few years moved into manufacturing more multimaterial components and subassembly work, Riemer said. The company isn't in position yet to do fully finished device manufacturing or assembly because it isn't Food and Drug Administration-registered, but that is an area it wants to pursue when it finds the right opportunity with the right partner, he said.

For now, its multimaterial projects might include molding a thermoplastic part and molding a silicone component onto that; assembling an extruded part as a piece of a larger component; or assembling a metal component acquired from outside. MRPC has positioned itself to do more of these types of jobs, and last year it secured two customers with its subassembly business, Riemer said.

“Those projects are moving into production as we speak, so we'll start realizing revenues in 2010, and then get into a more mature business pattern of sales on those jobs in 2011 and beyond,” he said.

The company has set up some work centers in the facility dedicated to subassembly work, and to support that commitment it is buying some molding machines; automation machinery for assembly; other secondary operations equipment; curing ovens for bonding of materials following assembly; and pack-

aging equipment for components prior to shipping to sterilization houses, Riemer said.

The bulk of the company's production space—about 50,000 of 85,000 square feet in three separate buildings—is dedicated to clean room molding. Three of the areas, each of which are Class 8/100,000, house silicone processing, custom rubber processing and molding, and thermoplastic molding and assemblies, respectively.

The fourth room, a Class 7/10,000 area, contains molding of implantable polyetheretherketone parts and long-term implantable silicones, Riemer said.

The plastics side of the business is growing, but in most cases it is as a complement to the silicone business, like in overmolding or two-component assembly operations, he said.

“Generally we don't go to market as a stand-alone thermoplastics molder,” he said. “Wherever we can provide value with our thermoplastic capabilities in conjunction with our elastomer capabilities is where we're real successful. Quite frankly, we don't have a big enough thermoplastic operation to stand alone and compete with big players in the marketplace.”

Looking ahead

MRPC believes it has used its resources wisely by investing in better technology, quality systems and people over the past couple of years. By being able to prepare for better times when the market was soft, it will be in a much better position to compete and grow as a company.

That's important, Riemer said, because with many companies teetering from the bad economy of 2009 and possibly going out of business, potential customers are looking to partner with financially strong companies. MRPC believes it fits that bill.

“That's something we're proud of,” he said. “We're debt-free, we continue to invest in good people and equipment and are making ourselves the best we can be. When the economy starts to make its turn, we're going to be ready to really take off.”



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RPN photo by Brad Dawson

Medical show

Rod Chambers (left) and Ken Hanke of RD Rubber Technology Corp. await potential customers visiting the company booth at the Medical Design and Manufacturing West expo in Anaheim, Calif.