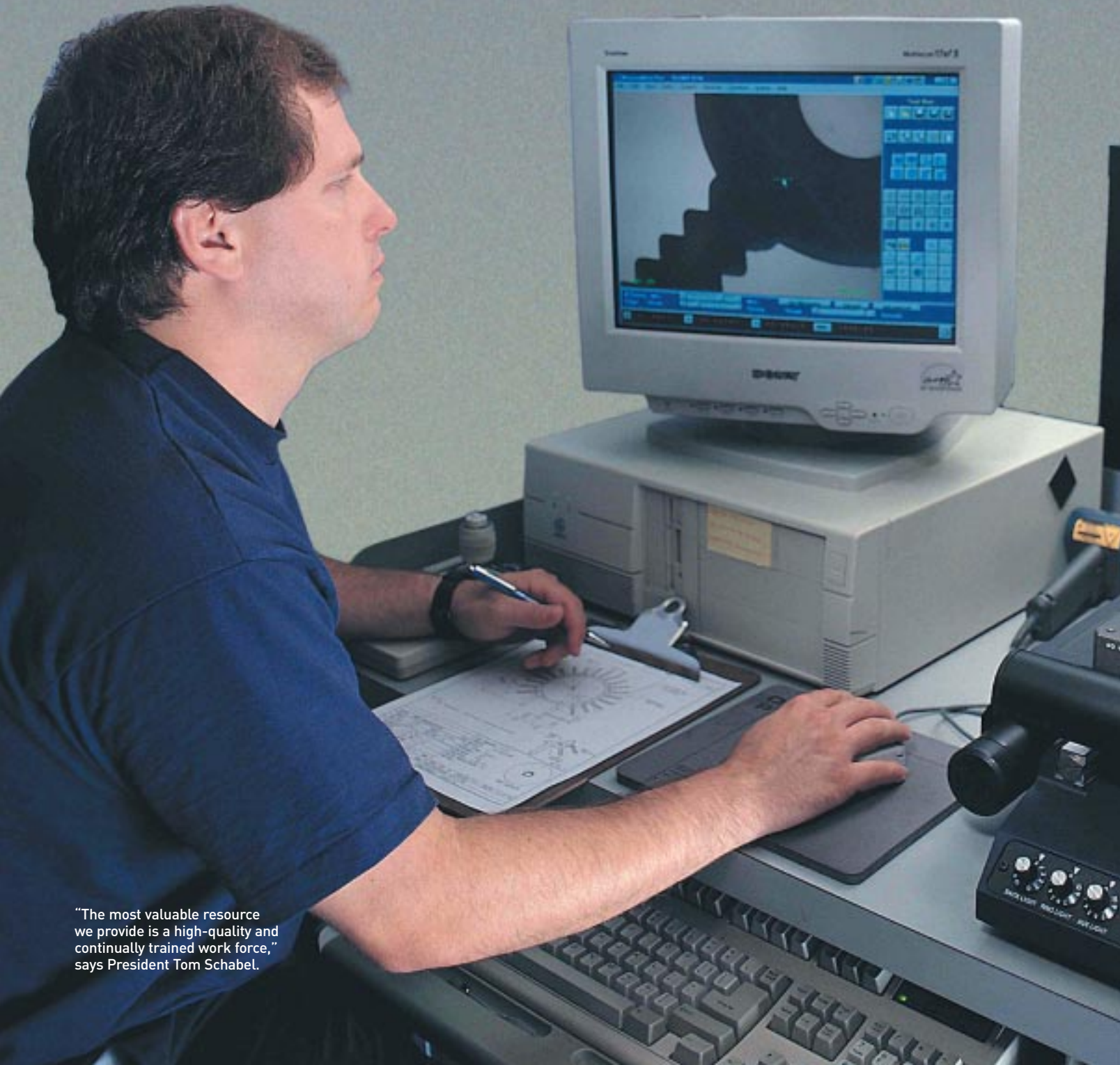


ALEXANDRIA RESPONDS QUICKLY TO DEMANDS

BY ERICA GALLAGHER



"The most valuable resource we provide is a high-quality and continually trained work force," says President Tom Schabel.



In many of its customers' industries, being first to market is significant, so Alexandria Extrusion Co. must respond quickly. Alexandria is a privately held manufacturer of tight-tolerance aluminum extrusions offering design assistance, prototype development and value-added services to customers in a wide range of industries and markets. The industries – according to Tom Schabel, president – range from recreational products and hand-held power tools to durable medical equipment.

To serve its clients, Alexandria is able to compress lead times in all of its operations, including quotes, administrative, billing and manufacturing. "Our entire continuous improvement focus has been on compressing lead times and being able to respond quicker to the customer," Schabel explains. "Ultimately, our goal is to reduce cycle times, inventory requirements and eliminate obsolete inventory."

Quick response and efficiency is coupled with a strong customer focus. "We have the ability to design for manufacturability and put an emphasis on how engineering staffs can work together," he says. "One of our durable medical equipment customers said working with our engineers is like working with another engineer on their staff."

QUALITY AND INNOVATION

In 1996, Alexandria became one of the first aluminum extruders in the United States to earn ISO 9002 certification, and in 2001, it followed that up with ISO 9001:2001 certification. Along the way, it has twice been recognized by the Minnesota Quality Council, and also received the Minnesota Governor's International Trade Award naming it one of the state's fastest-growing international firms.

"It is our policy to honor the commitments made to our customers in all segments of our relationship," the company says. "We are bound by these commitments to meet or exceed our customer's expectations regarding quality of product and service, lead time/on-time delivery, long-term relationships and continuous improvement."

From a safety standpoint, Alexandria trains internally and has recently won the MNSTAR award for safety. MNSTAR is a Minnesota Occupational Safety and Health Administration program that recognizes companies where managers and employees work together to develop safety and health management systems that go beyond basic compliance with all applicable OSHA standards, and result in immediate and long-term prevention of job-related injuries and illnesses.

"Only 10 or 11 other companies have attained that," Schabel says. "We're involved in continuous improvement in the safety area."

Innovation is another important area concerning Alexandria. Schabel says the firm benchmarks extensively in the indus- »

PROFILE

Alexandria Extrusion Co.
www.alexandriaextrusion.com
2003 Sales: \$40 million
HQ: Alexandria, Minn.
Employees: 300
Service: Alum. fabrication
Tom Schabel, president:
"One of our customers said working with our engineers is like working with another engineer on their staff."



» try and recently sent senior management to visit 30 or 40 different aluminum extruders to see what others are doing and exchange best practices. “This allows us to look at what’s best for us,” he says. “In-house, we have a full engineering staff, a full tooling department and an automation department, which allows us to stay on the cutting edge.”

The engineering staff has presented a paper on process control and technology to the International Extruders Council, for example. The automation department helps productivity in the extrusion process as well as minimizes labor, reduces process variation, and increases capacity in the value added areas, which allows Alexandria Extrusion to be cost competitive. “We use robotics for assembly and machining products,” Schabel says. “We make robotics versatile so they can go from job A to job B using the same automation.”

LONG TERM RELATIONSHIPS

Developing long-term customer and vendor relationships is important, according to Schabel, so much so that its tagline is “People Make the Difference.”

“The more people we can expose to our vendors and customers, the greater profitability they will develop in the long-term,” he says. “The most valuable resource we provide is a high-quality and continually trained work force. From our unique certified extruder program to mandatory process control training and interpersonal skills workshops, our employees take advantage of the best training resources available.

“That commitment to education, continuous improvement

and providing our customers with the highest-quality service plays out every day on every project as our people go the extra mile to make a difference,” he adds.

Alexandria has teams of employees dedicated to customers and markets to learn more about them, enabling them to become solution providers on an ongoing basis.

Schabel says Alexandria’s vision for the future is simply to continue to study the process control of all processes that it operates, and tighten them up to best serve customers. “We will do so with the intent to minimize labor content so we can be at the cutting edge of tolerancing processes’ controls and from a cost standpoint,” he says. “We believe there is a place for manufacturing to compete on a worldwide basis. With the use of our know-how and technology, we stand a great chance.”

PRODUCT LINES

Since its founding in 1966, Schabel says, Alexandria has been committed to using industry-leading technology and the highest quality work force to provide innovative design and manufacturing solutions to functional, aesthetic and marketplace challenges. The firm’s 150,000-square-foot production facility is located in Alexandria, Minn., where 300 employees produce marketplace solutions for a medical equipment customer base.

Today, its expertise is brought to bear in the growing medical equipment market, where the company has helped market leaders design award-winning products, earning the 2003 MDEA Design Excellence Award, and both the MEDTRADE Distinction Award and Innovation Award in 2002, among others.

“At the core of [our] success in the medical products market is a dedicated and experienced team of engineers, manufacturing specialists and market experts,” the company says. “Their early involvement in the design cycle translates into tooling options that allow projects to move quickly from concept to prototype; samples that prove out design capabilities and functionality; and end-product components unmatched in aesthetics and innovation, cost-savings and lead-times.”

When it comes to power tools, the company says it has been providing market leaders with versatile, durable and lightweight components for more than three decades. “We have a dedicated and knowledgeable team of engineers, manufacturing and quality specialists and market experts on hand to better meet the needs of this growing market,” the company says. “Their early involvement in the manufacturing process translates into end products that meet or exceed industry standards in terms of consistent quality, durability and safety, and also deliver genuine cost savings through low initial tooling outlay, shortened manufacturing lead times and a focus on continuous improvement.”

Alexandria says it is committed to exploring and implementing flexible and versatile design solutions for customers in the power-driven hand tool market. **MT**