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Beckwith Electric eyes growth in energy saving

Premium content from Tampa Bay Business Journal by Jane Meinhardt, Staff writer

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LARGO — Market diversification added some voltage to Beckwith Electric Co. sales, providing the Largo manufacturer with stability and growth.

The family-owned and operated business reaches out globally to forge new partnerships and network with related companies in the electric power industry.

Beckwith Electric, a \$20 million company, now counts on exporting its products and engineering services for nearly 28 percent of its overall sales, a strategy that has resulted in a 16 percent work force increase over the past seven years.

Beckwith has 125 employees, many of whom have been with the company 10 years or more.

Because of its consistently strong sales even in the economic downturn, the company has had no layoffs or salary cuts, said Thomas R. Beckwith, chief executive officer.

Founded in 1967 near Chicago, the company engineers, manufactures and markets products that control and protect the generation and transmission of electric power.

In addition to major U.S. electric utilities, the company's products and engineered technology can be found in Japan, South Africa, Mexico, India, the Middle East, Indonesia and Russia.

Building on growth tactics

"We do business with partners," Beckwith said. "Part of our international business model is forming alliances with companies for sales and technical support and letting them have some business. We are a company that doesn't want to grab all the marbles."

He continues the legacy of his late father, Robert Beckwith, by participating in international industry forums — even leading some — establishing collaborations and building global recognition for the company. The company has a presence at most major industry trade shows as part of its marketing and does little advertising.

The fact that it is a family-owned business adds to its strength, Beckwith said.

"When you're family-owned, you really put passion into it," he said. "You do the right things for the right reasons."

The company's international market successes were recently recognized by the U.S. Department of Commerce, which awarded the business its Export Achievement Certificate.

Beckwith is a good example of a company that has been pro-active in the exporting arena, said Sandra Campbell, director in Clearwater of the U.S. Commercial Service, the trade promotion arm of the U.S. Department of Commerce's International Trade Administration.

"Its percentage of export sales is very healthy," Campbell said. "A lot of companies you talk to only have 5 to 10 percent in exports."

High-tech manufacturing, testing

The company invests in equipment necessary for quality control and production. Its 50,000-square-foot plant has the latest in automation for manufacturing electrical products, including robotic equipment and a \$70,000 machine that precisely puts a military grade coating on circuit boards for protection against environmental degradation. The shiny, gray plant floor has a special epoxy coating to prevent static electricity that could damage devices being manufactured.

Products manufactured include a \$7,000 generator protection system for nuclear power plants that can detect trouble and trip a generator off line, \$18,000 power system data recorders and \$1,200 transformer protectors.

Gold connectors are used in products to avoid issues with corrosion and similar problems. Some circuit boards have 14 layers.

Every product the company manufactures goes through a series of in-house tests, including exposure to 155 degrees Fahrenheit, to insure everything is working properly.

Dedication to quality control keeps customers happy and maintains the company's reputation. It also keeps utilities and other related businesses from experiencing potentially catastrophic problems.

"You gotta do it right, or something bad will happen," Beckwith said.

He does not plan to sit back and savor the company's achievements. Beckwith already is planning strategy to take advantage of the smart grid focus in domestic markets that uses components to manage and save energy.

"We've been working on smart grid devices with some big power companies," Beckwith said. "That's where we see growth."

INFO

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