North American extrusion expansion

The world's largest aluminium extruder has expanded with the aim of meeting an expected increase in demand in the extrusion market

The expansions by Sapa Extrusions North America aim to meet expected increases in the North American aluminium extrusion market, caused by increased demand in industries including transportation, industrial applications, automotive and solar/renewable energy.

"We are seeing a definite turn-around in the market that has us fairly optimistic about 2012," said Patrick Lawlor, President of Sapa Extrusions North America, who took on the role in September 2010.

The company has focused its efforts on expanding operations and boosting innovation. At the forefront of its product development is its North American Technical Center, at its Portland, OR plant.

The centre hosts the Sapa Profile Academy, a three-day training course that provides opportunities to raise skill levels and encourages competition among companies and designers.

Starting with the Portland plant in 2000, the company has grown to 16 locations throughout the USA and Canada, employing 4000 people and producing hundreds of variations of extrusions for many industries.

With its increased visibility, Sapa has been an active advocate for the use of aluminium, establishing partnerships with groups including the Aluminum Extruders Council and the Aluminum Association.

Sapa's emphasis on enhancing capacity has resulted in it spending $55M/y for the past two years in its North America operations. The company has expanded facilities, including those in Portland, Oregon, Miami, Florida, Delhi; Louisiana, and Cressona; Pennsylvania. It has also expanded its overall casting capability to increase self-sufficiency and widened a number of its product offerings, including the addition of a horizontal powder coat paint line in Mississauga, Ontario.

The business has also invested in fabrication and machining equipment for several of its North American locations.

The expansions have brought new jobs. "We have received a lot of support from the surrounding business communities," remarked Lawlor. "We are optimistic that with the increase in the manufacturing sector of the economy, Sapa can continue to expand and create more jobs."

Funding

Several facilities received funding from local government groups to help expand operations. With the acquisition of a 142,800ft^2 industrial building in the Port of Vancouver, Washington, the company expects its die manufacturing capacity to increase by 40%.

Sapa received an $800k loan from a Washington State economic development board and $500k in matching funds from the Port of Vancouver for the expansion. Its Delhi, Louisiana expansion included the acquisition of a 50,000ft^2 industrial building to house Sapa's REDD (Research Engineering Development and Design) Team operations. The expansion was supported by a $300k performance-based grant from a Louisiana economic development's group.

Cressona

Its Cressona, Pennsylvania location is the largest extrusion facility in North America. It received funding to increase its operations with the expansion of a new casthouse, part of an effort to become self-sustaining by re-using scrap metal. The casthouse expansion will add 100 million pounds/y of additional capacity to its total casting operations nationwide.

The company will also spend $34M at Cressona to buy a 14-inch indirect press, scheduled to be operational by Q3 2012. It means the company can produce a higher quality rod and bar product line.

Sapa is the only North American soft alloy extruder with indirect press technology. A new indirect press will increase production speed per unit by 50%, resulting in better grain structure and overall quality of product. The indirect press will recover more scrap material at Cressona, yielding a lower operating cost to produce current rod and bar offerings.

Other R&D efforts include a new heat sink technology using Friction Stir Welding (FSW) patented by the company's North American Technical Center. By combining the design efficiencies in aluminium extrusions with FSW technology, the Tech Center has developed thermal management solutions that could improve performance and lower costs to bonded-fin or pressed-fin technology users.

"Our company has always thrived on meeting challenges to find new solutions for our customers. Conceptually, we refer to it as Aluminology," said Lawlor. "Later this year, we plan to announce several advancements that will further shape the future of our industry." ■

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The expanded casthouse at Cressona includes a tilting furnace with pouring trough and SNIF filtration equipment

Rick Donati, Chief Extruder, operates the controls for one of the extrusion presses at the Cressona facility