

# Developments

Helping Employers Retain & Create Quality Jobs Rockford, Illinois USA

## How Three Companies Thrive in Challenging Times

Even during prolonged recessions, some companies consistently succeed. *What do they do that helps them compete successfully in a global marketplace?*

**DEVELOPMENTS** interviewed three RAEDC investors to learn what gives them a competitive edge. **Forest City Gear's workload is up 30 percent over 2010. Rockford Toolcraft is completing a 41,000 SF addition due to increased business. Danfoss Power Electrics has doubled its manufacturing and office space since 2008.**

### Workforce is Key

Each company identified a variety of key strengths and strategies **but the common denominator is the "right people."**

Fred Young, president of Forest City Gear in Roscoe, looks for self-starters with a "gung ho attitude who are willing to continue learning," he shared. "These days it is more difficult to find people who are experienced and talented, who have what I call the three As--aptitude, attitude and attendance," he conceded. "But we have sophisticated Fortune 500 companies that buy from us, so our people have to be able to explain complex parts that are used for a wide variety of applications, like the Martian rover vehicle."

In his opinion, Forest City Gear is the most modern gear facility in the world because of their advanced equipment. Those capital investments over the years have led to extensive training programs. His workforce must continually learn how to operate the new machines and be more knowledgeable about metallurgy, heat-treating and other processes.

His company also pays for middle- and upper-management to take classes at Rockford College. There are five employees enrolled out of a workforce of 87 full-time employees. "We do this so they can be better managers, gain more self confidence and feel better about themselves, particularly

with the exposure to the liberal arts," he explained.

Rockford Toolcraft specializes in metal stamping dies and heavy-gauge stampings for the agriculture and transportation industries. They've expanded 15 times since they moved to their first plant in the Greater Rockford Industrial Park in 1985. Jerry Busse, chief executive officer, identified excellent, personal attention to customers as the key to their success. "We train people to do a good job. We pay attention to details," he said.

One example is that telephone calls are answered by a person, not an automated system. "Our people know that phone calls from customers are critical, they overshadow everything. We take the calls. We never say, 'that person is in a meeting.'" Also, managers will take phone calls at night, at home. Jerry is proud that he maintains a personal relationship with almost all of his employees. With nearly 300 employees, he plans to stay at that workforce level and remain agile. "The relationships are critical. We must remain allies together working for a common cause," he emphasized.

Danfoss Power Electrics in Loves Park is part of Danfoss, headquartered in Denmark, which manufactures energy-efficient products for the refrigeration and air-conditioning industry, the indoor comfort and heating sector and other energy-consumption industries. Locally Danfoss

focuses on frequency converters and process controls for energy savings.

In August 2011, they broke ground on a new 100,000 SF logistics facility adjacent to its existing plant on North Bell School Road. "We will move all logistics out of this building and use it for pure manufacturing and engineering. That gives us increased capacity for existing products and new products lines," said Jorn Rosenlund, senior director - supply chain. He credited the local staff as meriting corporate's confidence. "We have a very productive workforce here. Perhaps it's the Midwestern work ethic," he added. "It is our corporate strategy to have all sites be a similar critical mass. Having a more diverse base of employees is advantageous for us and helps us deliver better products," he explained.

Having a pipeline of talent skilled in electrical engineering, specifically power engineering, is important to Danfoss. They've begun a recruitment relationship with education partners, such as the Discovery Center, Rock Valley College and others. Jorn expects that the local Danfoss plant will add about 200 employees in the next three to four years, mostly engineers. "The energy-saving or renewable energy industry is growing extremely fast. Danfoss has anticipated where the market is going and we are ready with the products. With the proper incentives in this industry, many jobs could be created in the U.S.," he predicted.



Employee training is a high priority at Forest City Gear, as the company continually invests in a wide variety of new equipment. Blanking Supervisor Tommy Kalt shows off a new CNC lathe that makes gear blanks.



The fifteenth expansion for Rockford Toolcraft, a metal stamping manufacturer, is a 41,000 SF addition to Plant #2, making it now 195,000 SF.



Danfoss' new 100,000 SF logistics building, top middle, allows the power electrics company to devote the original building, bottom, to pure manufacturing and engineering.