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## Smart investing keeps Mack Molding growing

**KEITH WHITCOMB JR.**

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ARLINGTON -- A local manufacturer has experienced double-digit growth over the past fiscal year and expects to grow even more is hiring.

Mack Molding, a company based in Arlington since the 1920s, saw a 10 percent increase in sales during the 2010 fiscal year, and thinks it will do at least that in 2011, or 5 percent better, said Jeffrey Sample, president of northern operations at Mack Molding.

Sample said that over the past 18 months, the company has hired 50 people in engineering, management, and manufacturing positions. The bulk of the hires have been in Bennington County, and a few at a facility in Cavendish.

By late fall, the company hopes to open a machine center at an existing site in Arlington, which over the following year will add between 10 and 20 professional level full-time jobs, Sample said, adding that those positions will be advertised in local newspapers today.

He said the machine center will produce items the company currently purchases and represents a \$1 million investment. Some of the new machines include a 1,615-ton press, three electric presses, and two Swiss lathes.

Hit rough patch

Sample said some of the company's success has been from careful planning and restriction, and some plain luck. Currently, one third of what the company manufactures is medical in nature, and the company hopes to have that increase to 50 percent within the next few years.

He said the company

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hit a rough patch in the early 2000s when manufacturing contracts for its primary product, computer casings and related items, were shipped to China and Mexico. Coupled with a slight recession in computer products stemming from Y2K fears being unfounded and the [dot.com](#) bubble bursting, Mack Molding saw its business base begin to crumble.

The strategy the company employed was diversification, he said. Today, the company has contracts for everything from milk shake machines to mail sorting and medical devices. Sample said the company basically makes things that are "big, bulky, and complicated," or "BBC products" which don't lend themselves to being manufactured overseas. Sample said the milkshake machine is sold to stores that program their own mixes, so it's more complicated than the name suggests, as well as the mail sorting device.

Some of the company's other products include solar powered trash compactors.

Sample said the company has also been fortunate to have contracts on items that sell well. Medical products, for instance, take time to develop and spend many years on the market, providing steady work, Sample said.

He said the company's profits aren't quite where they were at their peak in the late 1990s, but he feels the company is in a better position now because it is more diverse and not reliant on one type of product.

During the more recent recession, Mack Molding invested in new equipment rather than hold off as many other manufacturers did, Sample said, adding that the aggressive investing has put the company in a solid position.

The company employs about 450 people in Vermont, with 350 in Bennington County.

It recently put a warehouse it owns on Route 346 in Pownal up for sale. It had once been used to store finished equipment, Sample said, but with better shipping procedures, it was only being partially used.

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