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Business Outlook

Business Outlook: Mack Molding's caution with optimism

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Jeff Sample is president, Northern Operations, Mack Molding Co.

As a contract manufacturer, Mack Molding is the sum total of its customers. We make no products of our own, but rather manufacture for a variety of companies across several markets. We have been fortunate to have enjoyed double digit growth each of the last few years, and we will again this year. But it is more and more difficult to predict the longer view with certainty. Our customers are cautious as they, and we, face many unknowns that could potentially impact profitability.

The Affordable Care Act, for example, brings with it the medical device tax, a challenge for many of our medical customers, as well as uncertainty regarding the cost of health care for our employees. Simultaneously, Vermont is racing toward a single payer health system with the question of funding seemingly unanswered. The future of Vermont Yankee hangs in the balance, leaving utility costs up in the air. And on the national scene, the economy lurches from one fiscal crisis to another, forcing our customers to exercise extreme caution regarding spending decisions. Our sales forecasts predict continued confidence and growth, but increasingly, there are factors outside our control that leave the marketplace rattled and unnerved.

That said, Mack remains financially strong. This year, we invested roughly \$350,000 to support our recently installed

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clean room for molding orthopedic and medical disposables, and acquired software for managing the extended record-keeping that accompanies medical manufacturing. We have also committed resources to additional automation at our plant in Cavendish.


On the environmental scene, we have invested significantly in sustainable manufacturing and environmental protection efforts. We have made great strides in processing recycled materials. For example, we now mold a floor tile that is made of recycled materials, installs via an adhesive-free interlocking design, and is 100 percent recyclable. Since we began focusing on reducing consumption and increasing recycling of cardboard two years ago, we have gone from recycling 45,000 pounds per year to 440,000 pounds annually. We have replaced two older cooling towers with one more energy efficient system that will save 473,000 gallons of treated wastewater annually at our Cavendish plant. Plus, Cavendish has slashed fuel oil consumption by 61 percent over the past five years through common sense measures, including improved insulation, a window replacement program, and an energy-efficient rebuilding plan for areas damaged by Tropical Storm Irene.



We're also taking our sustainability efforts outdoors, where we've added apiaries, or bee houses, that will complement the community gardens and orchards we've developed for employees. Ultimately, we hope it will help combat the colony losses that now threaten pollination operations. Similarly, we've built 10 seven-chamber bat boxes housing 300 bats each, and will place them around all of our Vermont facilities this spring. Finally, to better manage our woodlands, we've established marked trails on 60 acres adjacent to the headquarters plant for hiking, snowshoeing and cross-country skiing for employees and their families.

So while we share our customers' cautious economic outlook, we are also encouraged by the growth of U.S. manufacturing and the strength of Mack's sales. We do hope for answers from the state this year, however, on health care, electrical power, and the financial implications of each — knowledge of the facts will provide a more certain foundation on which to make decisions as a Vermont company.

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