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Sunday, November 3, 2013

Ric Perry, president, Mack Prototype Inc., Gardner



Mr. Perry at the Mack Prototype plant in Gardner.

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Mack Prototype Inc. is a rapid prototype and low-volume manufacturer that builds parts with three-dimensional printers. The company employs 30 people in a spacious 85,000-square-foot space in Gardner. Mack Prototype is a subsidiary of Mack Group, a privately held, family-owned fourth generation business based in Arlington, Vt., with nine locations in the United States and one in Mexico. Ric Perry has been president of Mack Prototype since 1999, when the parent company, Mack Group, purchased what was then Apple Pattern.

What is 3-D printing?

"3-D printing is the generic term for additive manufacturing. It's a way to produce parts by growing them, if you will. There's many different technologies out there. Probably one of the first ones was stereolithography. It used a vat of liquid epoxy that was UV-sensitive, and a laser beam would solidify layer by layer and build a part. Here in Mack Prototype in Gardner we use FDM, or fuse deposition modeling, and that uses a plastic. It comes on a spool.

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It's fed up through a print head and is laid down layer by layer to build a part, to grow a part, henceforth additive manufacturing, as opposed to traditional machining, which they refer to as subtractive manufacturing."

How did you become interested in and learn about 3-D printing?

"I've been involved in this industry just about my whole life. I was part of the group that put the first steriolithography machine in Digital Equipment Corp., and I'm guessing, if I'm right, I think the year was 1987 or 1988. So that was one of the first 3-D printers or additive manufacturing machines in New England at the time. So I've been involved in the industry, really since the beginning."

What does your company do besides 3-D printing?

"Mack Prototype is a full-service, new-product-development company. We offer a lot of processes under one roof, including the fuse deposition modeling, CNC machining, cast polyurethane, full-finishing painting capabilities as well as low-volume injection molding. Our claim to fame in the injection molding side of the business is we mold the tibial trials used in knee replacement operations and we're currently running about 675 part numbers in that particular program right now."

What types of products do you make and who purchases them?

"Our products are all custom products. We're producing them for the OEMs (original equipment manufacturers), for the large orthopedic companies such as Stryker, Wright Medical (Technology), Smith & Nephew, which are some of our customers."

What is your background?

"My background is manufacturing engineering. I grew up in Detroit in the automotive industry, went to Florida, was involved in aerospace, moved up to New England, got involved in Navy Nuclear and ended up at Digital Equipment for a number of years, in manufacturing engineering and new product development."

Why did Mack Prototype locate in Gardner?

"We were in Sterling when we were Apple Pattern and this nice facility became available. I say nice facility now. It took a lot of work but we took this old furniture factory that was built about 80 years previous and refurbished it, and it suits our needs real well. Gardner's been a great place for us to do business, great access to Route 2. The city officials, including the fire department, were very helpful in the process of re-doing this building."

Mack Group, your parent company, recently received an environmental designation from the state of Vermont, where they are located. Why did they receive this designation?

"They received it for their environmental plan that they put together. It's quite a comprehensive plan. It includes energy conservation, waste reduction, land preservation and management and environmental education and awareness. Some of the things they've done is (put in) trails around the plant that they maintain for hiking and cross-country skiing. They've actually put in a number of apiaries. They've installed a new lighting system. They've purchased green CPUs and battery backups. They've actually reduced their power usage in the three plants of Vermont by 7 percent. They're one of only three manufacturing companies in the state to receive this designation, and they have to apply for it every year."

What do you enjoy doing in your free time?

"I enjoy golfing, boating, jet skiing, and that's about it."

Compiled by correspondent Faith Pistrang

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