

Sterling solves others' construction woes

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MOUNT CLEMENS, MICH. — For two decades, Sterling Contractors Inc. has specialized in building plastics processing operations for other businesses.

Now the company is constructing its own 20,000-square-foot building that can house a variety of molding operations.

The contracting company is not contemplating plastics production itself but instead intends to turn its base into a temporary home for customers to test equipment even before their own buildings are ready.

"It saves them a lot of money if they don't have to have their facility ready eight months ahead of time just to get their tests run, then shut it all down and let it sit there until they're ready to

launch," Jeffrey J. Bianchini, project development engineer for Sterling, said in a Dec. 22 interview at the Mount Clemens-based business.

The new location near Utica, Mich., will allow customers to set up their own machinery and conduct any needed shakedown and tests. Once the building is completed, Sterling will install the equipment in its final home — putting it in place overnight if needed.

It is just the latest in the company's steady move into supplying the plastics industry full time.

Raymond A. Bianchini started Sterling as a general-purpose mechanical contractor. In the late 1970s, he was called in to make some connections for a site near Detroit for the former American Motors Corp.

Once on site, Raymond Bian-

chini said he could see the potential for his own business' growth.

"I said, 'Hey, these people need someone,'" said Raymond Bianchini, whose children also have joined the operation. "I realized there was a niche here."

By the early 1990s, Sterling was a steady contractor for processors as well as equipment and auxiliary suppliers looking for personnel for on-site installations.

Its customers typically are small to midsize molders that know where they want to go but do not have their own construction or relocation team to oversee expansions.

"We facilitate the molder," said Steven Pierik, project development manager. "Based on what they're running, what they need, we're able to offer a lot of expertise, from putting a layout together that's feasible to just making

the connections."

Its strength, Jeff Bianchini said, is in allowing molders to focus on their products, rather than spending their limited time and resources worrying about every element of building a new facility.

The company runs the gamut of construction work in the industry, building and connecting silos, dryers, loaders, water-cooling towers, pumping stations, air compressors, plumbing, heating, chiller units and complete buildings.

It has worked for injection molders, compression molders and blow molders. The bulk of its work has been for suppliers to the auto industry — mostly because of its location in suburban Detroit.

But its employees have set up shops in South Carolina, Missouri, Maryland and Georgia.

Pine River Plastics Inc. knew Sterling Contractors through its work near Pine River's base in St. Clair, Mich., and asked Sterling to build its new plant in Westminster, S.C., last year.

"I wondered if they could live up to their billing, and they really did," said Sam Konduros, general manager for Pine River's southeast operations. "They exceeded my expectations."

Sterling set up its employees in condominiums while they spent about six weeks installing all the process infrastructure at the plant — working even before the walls were completed, he said.

Konduros credited Sterling's crew for installing the equipment so well that the company went to a 24-hour schedule in its second week of operation — without a typical two- to three-month debugging period.